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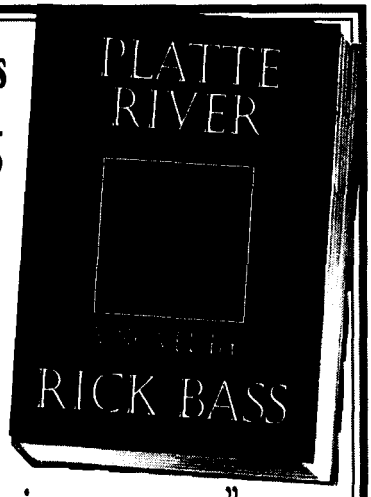

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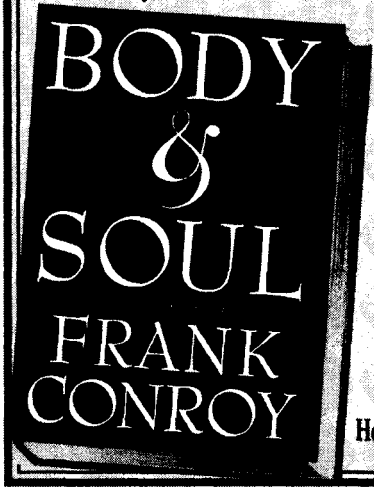

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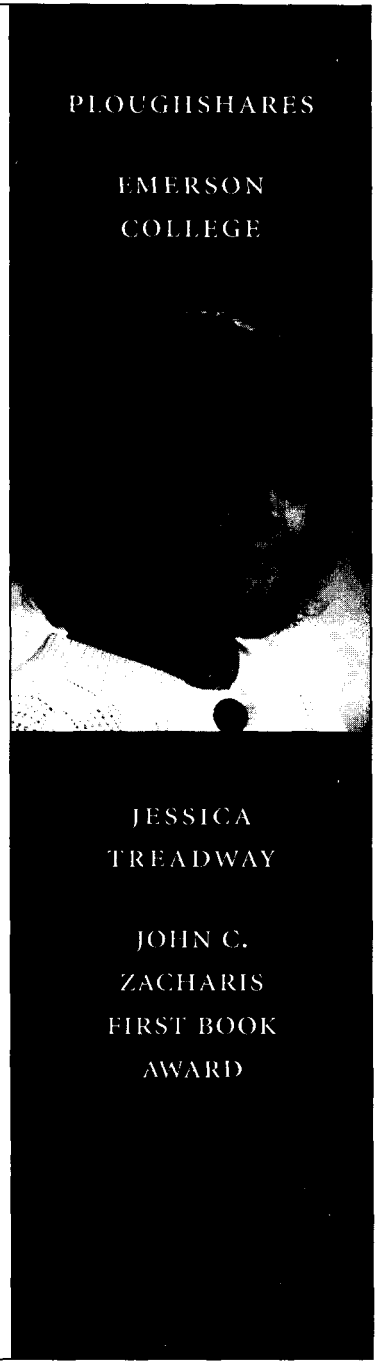
Ploughshares literary magazine and Emerson College are proud to announce that Jessica Treadway has been named the 1993 recipient of the John C. Zacharis First Book Award for her short story collection, *Absent Without Leave and Other Stories.* The annual $1,500 award—which is sponsored by Emerson College and named after its former president, John C. Zacharis—honors the best debut book of short fiction or poetry published by a *Ploughshares* writer.

Treadway was born in 1961 in Albany, New York. Her stories have appeared in *The Hudson Review, The Atlantic Monthly, Ploughshares,* and *The Agni Review.*

Absent Without Leave and Other Stories was published by Delphinium Books/Simon & Schuster in 1993 to enthusiastic praise, and clearly, the book found an audience as well: the entire printing of the book sold out in less than six months (publishers interested in paperback rights should contact Delphinium Books at 212-362-1104).

Treadway now teaches creative writing at Emerson College and is currently a Fiction Fellow at Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute. She is at work on a novel.

The Zacharis First Book Award is nominated by the Advisory Editors of *Ploughshares,* with Executive Director DeWitt Henry acting as the final judge. There is no application process.



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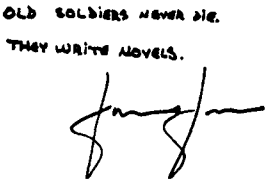

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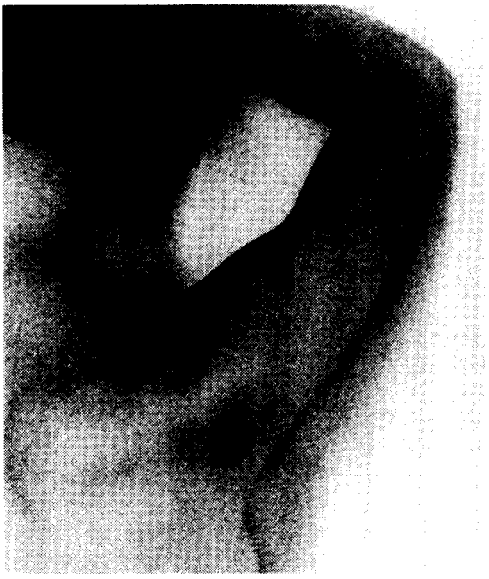

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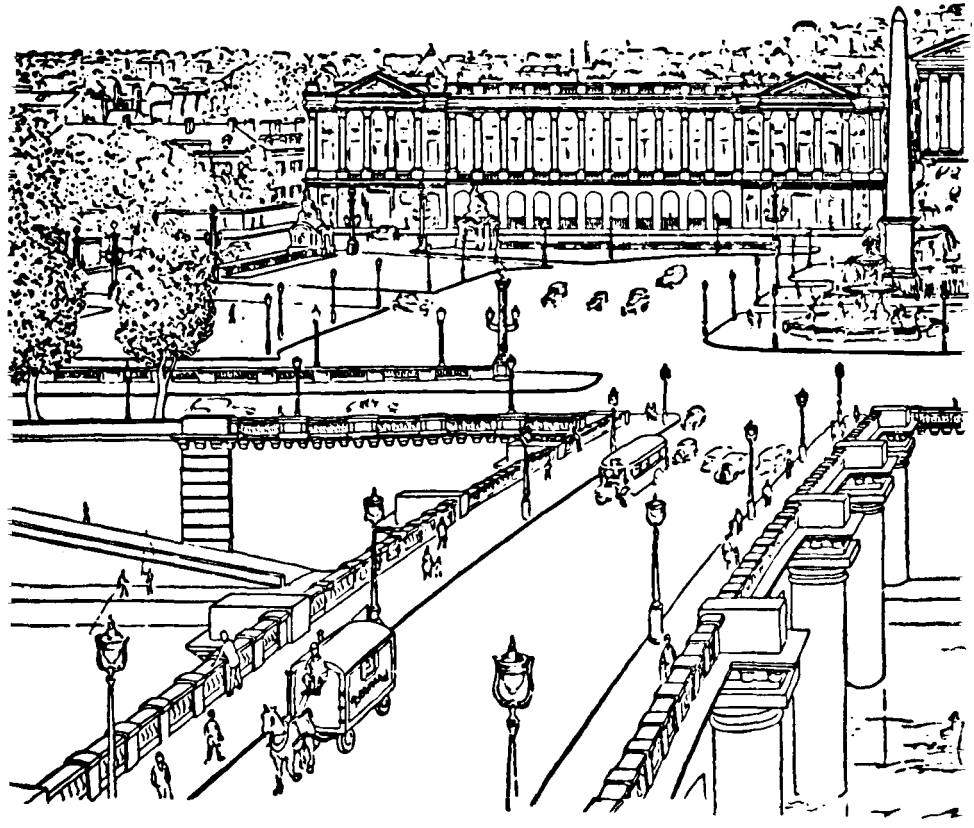

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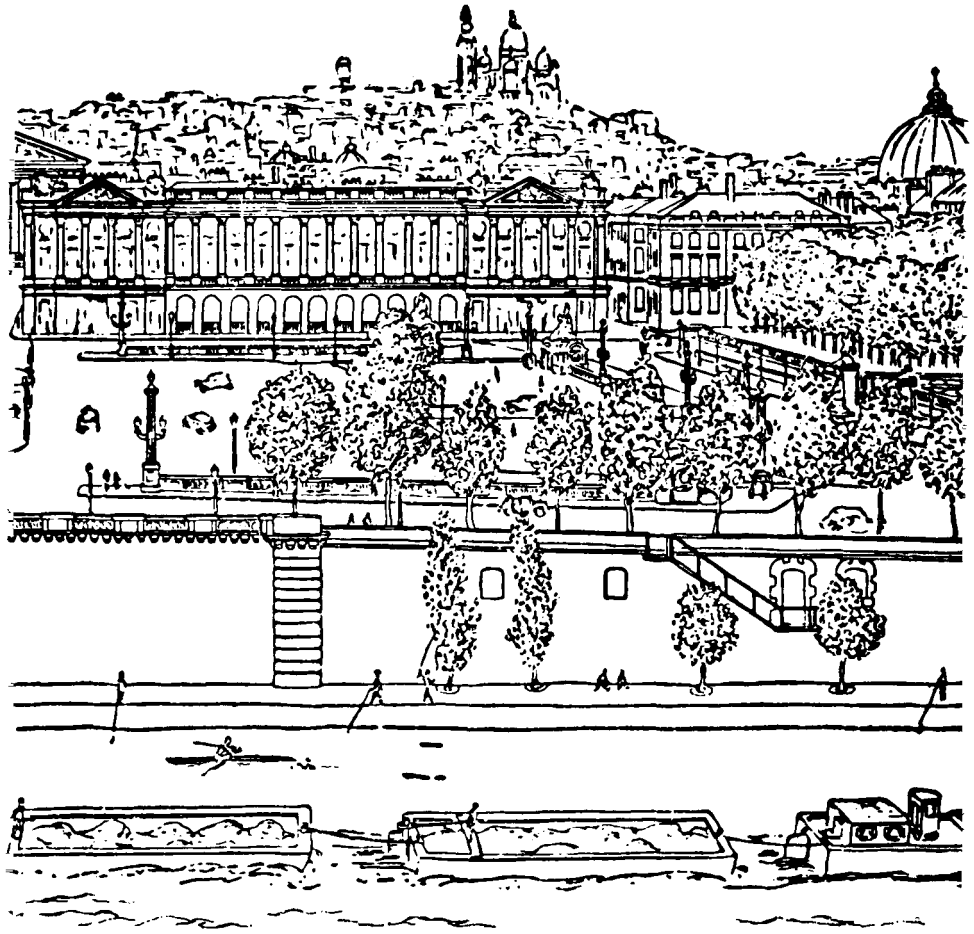

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Notice 14

We are especially pleased to announce that Drue Heinz has become the publisher of *The Paris Review*. She has had a distinguished career in literary matters—the publisher for many years of the literary magazine *Antaeus* and the founder of its publishing wing, Ecco Press, named after a favorite dog. Several other changes in the masthead should be noted: Jeanne McCulloch and James Linville have joined the upper echelon on the masthead—editors recognized for their efforts over the years and from the start. Elizabeth Gaffney, former senior editor, is now managing editor, and Gia Kourlas has become a senior editor. Joan Krawczyk has become the art editor, replacing Richard Marshall, who served the magazine with distinction since 1978. Daniel Kunitz, former assistant editor, is now an associate editor.

We are also pleased to report that Thomas H. Guinzburg has set up a considerable annuity for the magazine in memory of his fellow founding editors—Harold L. Humes and William Pène du Bois.

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NOTICE

In the anniversary issue I wrote a notice which on reflection may have seemed too critical of the National Endowment for the Arts's Literature Program. This summer—with admittedly some misgivings—I was persuaded to serve on a National Endowment panel (the prose section of the Individual Fellowships for Creative Writing Panel) and thus was able to get a look at the procedures first-hand. I came away impressed. The panelists do an enormous amount of work. In my own case I was required to read 350 manuscripts (the authors' names are kept anonymous), writing at least five lines of comment on each, and then to meet in full discussion (there were twelve prose panelists) for three days at the Endowment's headquarters in Washington to pick the grantees. The diligence and care with which these proceedings were conducted were reassuring.

It is worth noting that the Literature Program can fund only 8% of its applicants. Of the $151,000,000 allocated by the N.E.A. for project funding in fiscal year 1993, literature received a little over $4,000,000—about 2.8%. I was given some interesting comparisons: The city of Munich spends more on literature than the U.S. So does the Basque Ministry of Culture. The Canadian Province of Ontario spends twice as much. In fact, Canada as a whole spends over $24,000,000 (Canadian dollars) each year on literature. As most authors in the U.S. remember ruefully, especially on April 15th, Ireland feels so strongly about its writers that they are allowed to live there tax-free.

The conclusion here is that the literature program should receive far more funding from the Endowment. Surely it seems insufficient that literature should be pegged at 2.8% of the country's cultural output. An increased outlay for literature would be easier to do, of course, if the Endowment itself received more support.

While in Washington I met briefly with Jane Alexander who is the newly-picked head of the Endowment. She reiter-

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ated what one so often hears—that the best leverage in dealing with legislators is to walk into their offices armed with letters. So often, she said, she is confronted with congressmen who say they would like to support her, but what about *this*—and they produce boxes of letters condemning the N.E.A., the bulk of them form-letters from right-wing organizations. It is sad that legislative decisions are based to such an extent on the flow of mail from constituents, especially if some of it is blatantly bogus, but that being the game, *The Paris Review* urges its subscribers, contributors and readers to write their congressmen and -women in support of the National Endowment and its aims. There are well over 1,000 literary magazine and presses. It seems to us that these organizations are almost obligated to repeat messages of this sort to their constituencies—it is so obviously to their benefit. At the very least, it would be heartening to the Endowment to know that its cause is being supported by those whose welfare it is trying to improve.

Speaking of heartening letters, messages from two heads of state arrived too late to be included in the fortieth anniversary issue of *The Paris Review* where they belonged. They appear on the two pages which follow this notice. Our gratitude to both gentlemen.

—G.A.P.

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La "Paris Review" à 40 ans.

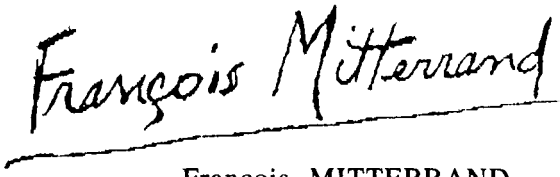
Nombreux sont les Français qui aiment les écrivains d'Amérique, ses poètes, ses romanciers, ses dramaturges. Il ont parfois contribué à leur reconnaissance.

La "Paris Review" sert, aux Etats-Unis, la découverte et le rayonnement de la littérature française.

Alors que de grandes secousses nourissent un peu partout dans le monde la tentation du repli, le dialogue des cultures est, plus que jamais, nécessaire.

Le mépris de la vie, la violence faite à l'autre ne cessent de ressurgir. Contre eux, l'intelligence et l'imagination ne doivent pas cesser de combattre.

Que l'une des plus prestigieuses revues littéraires du monde anglophone, continue de rapprocher les créateurs qui, de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique, mènent le combat de l'esprit: tel est le voeu que je forme à l'occasion de cet anniversaire.



François MITTERRAND

The Paris Review *at 40. Many French readers love America's writers, her poets, novelists, and playwrights; on occasion they have contributed to the recognition of those writers. In the United States,* The Paris Review *contributes to the discovery and the dissemination of French literature. Because great upheavals the world over constantly encourage the temptation to isolationism, the dialogue between cultures is more necessary than ever. Imagination and intelligence must continue to combat mounting instances of violence and contempt for human life. That one of the most prestigious literary periodicals of the English-speaking world may continue to unite the creative minds engaged in this battle: such is my wish on the occasion of this anniversary.*

—trans. R.H.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 9, 1993

It is a pleasure to extend greetings to everyone gathered in Easthampton, New York, to commemorate the grand occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Paris Review.

Your magazine has distinguished itself over four decades with an emphasis on superior creative literature. Through your periodical, hundreds of poets, writers of fiction, and artists have received the vital exposure that is so necessary to sustain their craft. The Paris Review has provided a profound legacy to our nation's literary heritage, and I commend each of the contributors for their devotion to expanding our artistic culture.

The Review's ability to persevere over the years is a tribute to the quality of the writers and supporters who have sustained this outstanding magazine since 1953. I am pleased to offer my best wishes for continued success.

Bill Clinton

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You Must Relax!

Joanna Scott

What our grandmother keeps in her walk-in closet: pastel silks in pink and blue and peach, crepe de chine, chiffon, mousseline de soie, tulle, satin ribbons, boleros, corsets, hats with feathers, hats with cloth flowers, cloches, a beaded cap, tunics, hobble skirts, gray wool suits, evening dresses and dressing gowns.

Lately, Granny Madge has taken to locking herself in her closet. She sits on a metal folding chair for hours, counting aloud in a low, monotonous voice. While she counts we know that she is recalling those important moments that she would rather forget—it is her punishment to remember, she says. St. Paul de Vence, for instance, 1923, a garden party, a stone wall and morning glories wet with dew, slippery slate steps. She remembers exactly what she wore that day: her lemony silk dress and straw hat shaped like a chanterelle. Her husband wore gabardine. Her little boy Lou, our papa, wore knickers and a peasant blouse. Lou, his fists the size of apricots. He insisted on carrying the trifle himself though his arms couldn't reach entirely around the width of the glass bowl. Layers of wine-soaked sponge biscuits, ratafia cakes, whipped cream,

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fresh raspberries. He staggered beneath the weight. Still, such challenges are important to children, Madge believed, so she let him carry the bowl, guided him by the shoulders up the steps to the terrace, the brim of her hat covering Lou in shadow, his face pinched in a knot of concentration, reddening as he neared the trellis canopy. His mother didn't notice his diminishing strength or his gasps, though, because as she climbed the final steps she heard a familiar voice coming from the far corner of the terrace. She couldn't make out what it was saying but she recognized that voice. Five years had passed since she'd heard it last. If a century had passed she still would have known it instantly.

In an attempt to avoid the meeting she backed down a step, away from the terrace, fell off balance and stumbled. She jostled Lou ever so lightly, reason enough for him to give up his impossible effort. He let his arms go limp as he mounted the top step, and the bowl—a punch bowl that was an heirloom two generations old, glass engraved with an intricate floral design on the island of Murillo—the bowl, the trifle, the candied violets slipped from the little boy's arms and crashed onto the terrace.

The next awful minutes are like a photograph in our grandmother's mind, a scene removed from time, coated with resin. She remembers: the embarrassed glances directed at her from three sides, the top of her son's bowed head, the splattered trifle that looked like the eviscerated carcass of a large rabbit, white fur and bruised, purplish tissue, the puddle of raspberry blood already coagulating. In her memory she stands apart, watches herself as though she were another guest, sees a woman, mesmerized, sees a boy with eyes squeezed shut trying to will away the accident and make time go backward, sees, then, a middle-aged man come toward her.

He'd grown a beard, a black, patchy chin-beard; he'd put on weight so his face had lost its slender, oval shape, and he wore a monocle as though he were an intellectual when in fact he was nothing but a showman, a pretender who flaunted knowledge, exploited knowledge, used knowledge as an alche-

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mist uses chemistry. Perhaps the five years since she'd seen him last, since she'd renounced him in an attempt to claim her self-respect again, had matured her so thoroughly that she could judge with critical detachment the doctor who had once entranced her. Or was it that he had changed, had lost his confident manner, had replaced homeopathic promises with insincerity? The doctor three years earlier had seemed a wise man, almost a prophet; in his place, Madge saw a hypocrite.

He walked across the terrace toward her, the one animated figure in the frozen picture, moved as steadily as a flame burning down the stem of a matchstick. He squatted in front of the shattered bowl and began picking out fragments of glass as though this would somehow help, carefully removed one sliver after another, and arranged the pieces in a pile at his side.

Finally Lou opened his eyes, saw that his wish hadn't come true, time hadn't reversed itself, he'd failed miserably, and even worse, no one reproached him. They were too full of pity to reproach him—he may not have understood much about adults but he understood that they were pitying him. And now a bearded man knelt before him, a grown man on his knees; nothing Lou had done had ever produced such dramatic consequences. He looked up at his mother, not quite believing that he was responsible, looked back at the man, looked at his mother, saw an unfamiliar expression (and our grandmother, in her memory, sees everything now through her son's confusion), looked at the faces of strangers, looked at the man's hands again, then closed his eyes because he couldn't bear it anymore and began to scream.

His screams demanded action. There were brooms to be fetched, dustpans to be filled, Madge's husband, who had dallied at the bottom of the steps with the host and only now appeared, needed an explanation, Madge needed reassurance ("No doubt it would have been delicious, Madame Whitcombe"), the boy needed a biscuit, the doctor needed a towel. For some reason the hostess handed the towel to Madge first,

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so she was obligated to pass it to the doctor, who deliberately grabbed her hand along with the cloth, held her even when she tried to pull away, held her for so long and gazed at her with such offensive intimacy that for a second time a hush fell across the terrace, the guests stared, our grandmother blushed. It was a more fatal accident than a ruined trifle, this inopportune joining of hands.

Lou had taken refuge by his mother, stood underneath her outstretched arm, and the image of the three—the woman, the doctor, the boy in between—provided all the proof that anyone who ever had suspicions could have wanted. And they did have suspicions, Madge knew. Five years earlier people had whispered about her frequent consultations with the doctor, had wondered why her husband allowed her to go to Nice without an escort. But jealousy was as foreign to her husband as the French language had been to Madge during her first year abroad. She had learned French, though, had been forced to learn it, since her husband's touring agency kept him away for weeks at a time, and none of her neighbors spoke English. And now her husband would be forced to learn a new language: the language of jealousy. Not because the doctor looked at his wife with such ferocious interest; not because they continued to hold hands long after the interval proper for a greeting. While others saw proof, her husband would have a revelation: the woman, the doctor, the boy. As unarguable as simple addition. The boy, with his coxcomb of black hair and his large, wide-set brown eyes, his low forehead, his impish, pointed chin, was the obvious sum of two parts.

The doctor had damned Madge forever, had intended as much, she believed. Surely he must have known that she and her husband would be at this garden party. Four years ago he'd moved his practice from Nice to London, was now on his way to Lake Como for a holiday, had obviously delayed the last leg of the trip so he could be here, so he could see Madge, lovely Madge, "as beautiful as ever," he murmured, and finally released her.

She wiped her palm, wet from perspiration, on the side of

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her dress, gave him a polite if strained nod and pushed her son around the broken bowl and away from the stranger who was his natural father. Though everyone else knew the truth, even her husband—yes, her husband knew best of all—her son must never know.

And with nothing more to watch but much to discuss, the guests regrouped into neat patterns of colors that seemed to Madge both haphazard and carefully designed, like tinted glass in a kaleidoscope. While they didn't talk about her directly, through the next hour the men smiled at her with oblique amusement, and the women kept glancing from husband to wife to doctor, their eyes drawn by some irresistible force. The force of scandal. In private parlors and bedrooms gossip would flow from these people, her gentle Catholic friends, gossip would take the place of the trifle as their dessert, gossip would enrage, fatten, delight them, would give their insignificant lives meaning. Not only had the doctor calmed Madge's fraught American nerves five years earlier, not only had he given her back her peace of mind, he'd given her a bastard son as well. Not just a son. A son with Jewish blood. He'd given a Jewish baby to a Protestant adulteress—mixed blood, no good would come of the boy, he'd suffer for his mother's shame, and wasn't it more than coincidence that he'd dropped the precious glass bowl, a trial run for future catastrophes, the first act of many acts of violence to follow? Who could blame the doctor? He was just a man, with a man's instincts, a man's vulnerabilities.

Other women in the village had traveled to Nice by themselves to consult the famous doctor; other women had let him touch them as no one but their husbands should have touched them. But only Madge had borne his child. She knew what they would say about her behind her back; she knew that these self-proclaimed libertarians made pets of Jews, even on occasion made love to them. They wouldn't condemn her for love. But there was the question of purity. She had brought an impure child into the world, and though they could forgive him, they would never forgive her. She didn't have to rely on

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malicious confidantes to know what her friends were thinking. They would satisfy their hunger, would obscure the actual object of their prejudice by directing their thrilling, rapacious hatred at her.

Was our grandmother making unfair assumptions about these people? No fingers had been pointed, after all; no accusations had been made. To some observers this gathering might have held no secrets—once the trifle had been cleared up the guests resumed their separate conversations, mingled, told jokes, ate and drank and eventually dispersed. A garden party like any other garden party. This was one interpretation, and probably a few uninformed guests believed it. Maybe most of them believed it and hardly gave Madge a second thought. But the guest with the most at stake learned at this party that he'd been betrayed by his wife. Though her husband would never confront her directly, from that day on he would begin to withdraw behind a silent, brooding mask, would pretend that he no longer cared about her or Lou until he drove himself to despair with the lie.

They forced themselves to linger at the party. Madge's husband wandered around the rim of the terrace, admired the roses and foxglove and held out his empty glass whenever the waiter came by with an open bottle of champagne. Madge strolled from group to group, nodded politely when opinions were exchanged, brushed her fingers through her son's hair, caressed his cheek, kept him close to her, ostentatiously displayed her love for her son. Whatever her friends said about her, they couldn't deny that she loved her son.

After a suitable length of time the family departed, managing a discreet exit. Yet even as they descended the slate steps Madge sensed, and perhaps her husband sensed as well, that they would never appear together in public again.

Our grandmother is sitting in the dark. She used to spend her days in the living room playing solitaire or staring out the window. Now she just sits in the dark in the closet and counts aloud, higher and higher.

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Once in a while she stops counting and listens. Or she remembers listening, though it is almost the same thing. She remembers listening for the sounds of footsteps, cowbells, a dog's bark, anything that would destroy the illusion of solitude. She spent the summer of 1923 roving the hills with her son, gathering dandelion leaves and sorrel for salads that would never be made, nettles for stews, rosehips for syrups. After a rain she would forage in the pine groves for puffballs the size of turnips full of brown, powdery spores. And boleti, satanic boleti with spongy red caps. She would set the deadly mushrooms on the windowsill out of her son's reach, and when they had withered and shriveled she would throw them out and pick more. That summer she enjoyed a rare freedom, though at the time such freedom seemed a trap. No matter how far she walked she never reached a place satisfactorily remote, where she could have screamed as loud as she pleased, where she could have spit and danced naked. She was afraid, perpetually afraid of being discovered, afraid most of all of being discovered by the one who always accompanied her: her son.

Our father still speaks of these days as the finest of his childhood. No lessons to study, no obligations, nothing to do but leap over logs and bathe in shallow creeks, throw pebbles at fish, pet the whiskered muzzles of ponies, catch toads and grasshoppers. Ordinarily his mother was a grave and didactic presence, an unrelenting moral supervisor. *Energy, application, painstaking patience and persistence*. These were the words Madge used to repeat to her son. But that summer she acted as though idleness were the sole objective. The sun burnt Lou until he was "as crisp as a pygmy, and wasn't he just as illiterate and wild!" or so Aunt Sarah—Madge's sister—declared when she arrived in St. Paul de Vence to take charge. Someone had to take charge while the man of the house was off charting next year's tour through Greece, preoccupied with the difficult arrangements to be made, hotels to be booked, coaches to be hired, so busy that he didn't even have time to write to his wife. In his absence, the usually orderly household

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deteriorated. Weeks before Aunt Sarah arrived Madge had dismissed the cook, and she didn't even notice when spiders began spinning their webs across the doorways. Her son's mop of hair became so dense with tangles that she would simply pat her hands over the top without brushing it, bills remained sealed, and one afternoon she lifted the cloth from the bird-cage and discovered her neglected pair of canaries motionless on the floor of the cage. In their nest she found a cluster of speckled eggs.

That same day she wrote a long letter to her husband and addressed it to the pension where he was staying in Athens. She put her son to bed early and prepared supper for herself—a piece of chèvre, day-old bread, a fennel bulb, claret and boleti in cream. She ate three poisonous mushroom caps, laid down her spoon, and waited.

Rather, she continued to wait. She had been waiting all summer, and the stomach cramps at first were an exhilarating commencement: something was about to happen. She retired to her bedroom, propped herself up on her pillows and opened a book about gardening. But the drawings on the page made her nauseous, as though the sensation of taste were located in her eyes, the illustrations nothing but wormy, putrid pieces of food. Mushrooms in cream.

She hurried to the toilet, pulled her dress up and her bloomers down, shat a thin, bluish liquid, rolled over onto her knees and vomited. So this was life revealed: filthy, stinking, nothing noble about it, only pain and shit and bile. She retched again. Life leaked out, spilled, dripped, abandoned her. Madge had broken the trust, so life renounced its loyalties, left her hollow, or nearly so, and stuporous, drenched in sweat.

She managed to crawl back to her bed and almost immediately fell into a heavy slumber, only to wake an hour later for the second exodus: pain and shit and bile. But still enough life remained to keep the vital organs working, and though when she returned to bed the second time she felt sure she was dying, she woke at noon the following day to find that she hadn't died. And it was a good thing, wasn't it? With

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the cook gone someone had to prepare meals for her son. Her poor boy. Better for a boy to have an imperfect mama than no mama at all, she told herself as she ran her finger along the curved ridge of his spine. Her sweet child must have crawled into bed with her early in the morning, had forced himself to lie absolutely still so he wouldn't wake her and had fallen asleep.

Her joints throbbed, her brain seemed squeezed in a vise, but she managed to push herself to her feet. Downstairs in the kitchen she patched together a meal for her son of sliced peaches and eggs. Not until she had set his plate on the table did she notice the leftovers. A skin had formed on the cream; an inky brown leaked from the remaining mushrooms, and the color had spread like cracks in ice. Her son could have climbed up on the chair and helped himself. She might have poisoned her own son, her only child, might have even, in her despair, left the pan of mushrooms out for him—a madwoman's attempt to destroy the witness. She was insane, clearly, and if anyone had been checking on her these last weeks they would have surely committed her to an asylum, locked her away out of reach of the boy, restrained her so she could do no harm to anyone.

She let the eggs grow rubbery and cold and her son sleep while she wrote to her sister, who was married to an antique dealer and lived in Sussex, inviting her to visit. Then she poured the mushrooms into a square of cheesecloth folded to triple thickness, dropped the bundle into a burlap sack, and because she couldn't think how else to get rid of it she buried the sack in the vegetable garden.

Granny Madge didn't stay in Provence long enough to find out whether new mushrooms ever sprouted; a week after Aunt Sarah arrived Madge's letter to her husband was returned unopened, along with a note from the owner of the Athens pension informing her that her husband had never arrived, had never even landed in Piraeus. It appeared that Madge's husband had boarded a ship bound for Greece in Naples but had disappeared en route. Whether he had fallen or had been

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pushed, no one knew. The captain had filed a report with the police in Piraeus, and he would keep the gentleman's trunk in his possession until further notice.

Madge traveled with her son to Piraeus to claim her husband's belongings; from Greece they took a steamer back to New York. She wore black tulle over her head and had her meals delivered to her cabin. She hardly touched the food. By then, a month and a half since she'd last seen her husband, she knew that though she was a widow her family of two would soon be joined by a third: before he had set out for Greece, her husband had made certain that he left something of himself behind.

She gave birth to a second son the following winter. She soon tired of the city and by spring she had made up her mind to move upstate. She chose Spragton as her home simply by closing her eyes and placing her finger on a map.

Our grandmother is sitting in the closet in the dark. She inhales deeply, holds the darkness in her lungs as a child might hold water in his mouth. To us, the closet smells like an elderly woman—a particular combination of perfumes and old fabrics, the smell as unique as a thumbprint, slightly stale but not unpleasant. To Granny Madge, however, the closet smells of money. Whatever she wears, her wealth is obvious, she can't help it and would prefer to disguise the truth, though that would mean additional purchases, more money spent on new clothes that weren't so conspicuously dear, more money converted into less distinguished goods. Not that she was ever a spendthrift. Just the opposite. From the start she thought of her wardrobe as an investment—she spared no expense in the early years, and she's been rewarded with high returns.

Still, she wishes that her affluence weren't so apparent. Even strangers recognize the smell that clings to her. In the lightless closet she tries to differentiate between the smell of wealth and her own scent, but the air is saturated with purchases, articles that have only increased in value over time and that someday will be dispersed among the rest of us. Yes, she

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invested wisely—she knows that to her heirs, everything stems from this.

She exhales, inhales through her mouth with short, choppy gulps. She wonders whether she could choose not to breathe, could willfully close out the offensive smell, could hold her breath and still keep counting. It is comforting, but not comforting enough, to follow a sequence.

We are all proud of our grandmother. It wasn't with money—not entirely—that she gained influence. And her looks didn't "melt any hearts," as one ancient and slightly drunken Spragton dignitary had recently said to her in a fit of nostalgia. Her slight, girlish figure and tightly-wound chignon would have served another woman better, a woman who was less severe than our grandmother, less demanding. No, Margaret Whitcombe conquered Spragton by doing what she does so well—by counting aloud one wintry afternoon five decades ago.

Between 1900 and 1930 the population of Spragton increased by seventy percent. Our grandmother was lucky to arrive when the town still welcomed strangers, and if our family would never enjoy the status of families descended from the original settlers, Granny Madge did manage to become one of the town's most influential leaders. A widow, mother of two small children, a woman of independent means, not nearly as demure as she should have been, even tyrannical at times, without important connections and, evidently, with no intention of remarrying—who would have predicted in those early months that she would rise to such heights?

Of course she didn't have to start from scratch. On top of her inheritance she had money from her husband's life insurance policy. She had an original Paul Poiret dress. And she had two disarming sons, Lou a would-be lady's man even at the age of five, our Uncle Harry a sanguine infant who rarely fussed, a mother's dream. Whatever doubts the people of Spragton had about our grandmother, her devotion to her sons was undeniable. With a family to support, Madge's aggressive manner could be excused, could even be admired. Still, she needn't have been so suspicious, really—no one

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would have tried to take advantage of her. Spragton was made up of plain, trustworthy people, neighbors who prided themselves on their honesty. Fair and square, no one surreptitiously jacked the price or tried to undersell a competitor, no one disguised terms with legal jargon, no one inflated the worth of services. Naive ethics, perhaps, but intentionally naive—greed was considered not an intrinsic human trait but an aberration: both the cheat and the customer who believed himself cheated were unnatural, especially the latter, since in this economy based on trust no one had to worry. Or so the typical Spragton businessman believed. No one dared to cheat, no one dared to complain. Each small business was like a windmill, an intelligible source of power driven by an unpredictable, external element. Blades turned with an easy whir and hum or did not turn at all, depending on the weather. The essential thing was to invest your money well.

At first the board members of the major bank in town treated our grandmother warily. She had enough money to cause trouble, enough to know the pleasures of wealth, enough to want more. They would, they assumed, have to reckon with her. But once they had decided that her apparent ambition was nothing but pronounced maternal instinct, their doubts gave way to affectionate concern, though not yet to respect. Margaret Whitcombe had to win their respect.

"Affectionately Yours." With this, Velma Bartholomew, wife of Murrian, Chairman of the Board, signed the invitation. And she meant it, too, for Velma was a woman brimming with affection, a woman so adroitly officious that she gave the impression of belonging to whomever she was addressing, even in conversation poised her body in such a way—her back slightly arched, chin raised, eyes lowered—that she seemed on the verge of falling into the arms of whomever stood opposite.

At the Bartholomew's home one afternoon over fifty years ago, our grandmother stood opposite Velma, endured the gushing praise of this person she hardly knew, wearing all the while the distracted look of a mother who, with much reluctance, has left her young children in a stranger's care.

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It was a small party, given in honor of those newcomers who hadn't arrived in Spragton looking for handouts. Among them, Madge was particularly deserving, by common vote the bravest pilgrim of them all—everyone wanted to do something for her, though in the three months since she'd been in town she had made it clear that she would accept nothing for free. Unfortunate, the men agreed, that the widow was so testy.

Since she refused to hire an accountant to manage her finances, Murrian Bartholomew had to deal with her himself, though he relied on his wife to soften her hard edges, and he kept their meetings brief. Along with the others he felt great sympathy for the young widow. But when it came to business she had shown herself to be unyielding and unrelenting, nimble, potentially vicious, "a witch, to tell the truth," he had confessed to the bank's vice-president once while Madge sat outside his office. And she had overheard—not every word but enough to understand from then on the precise nature of Spragton's affection.

Poor widow, devoted mother, witch. Give her a glass of punch and let the wives take charge, let her prove that she can hold her own where she belongs, a lady among ladies. So Murrian privately reasoned that day at his party, and he led the men into his library. Here, away from their wives, the old guard could begin campaigning, which was the purpose of this party or of any of Murrian Bartholomew's parties. His fellow board members plied new, would-be investors first with bourbon, then with promises, assuring their interested listeners that whatever else was said about this northern outpost, the businessmen of Spragton never ran afoul. Fair and square. If Spragton had a motto, this would have been it: fair and square.

Though from the adjacent room Madge couldn't make out the particular negotiations taking place in the library, she had a talent for intuiting essences. She would have preferred to hear Murrian's sales pitch directly rather than through Velma. But resentment is useless for a woman, our grandmother believed. She thought it better to conform than to protest, better

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to take what she could given the restriction, better to maintain her dignity. With energy, application, painstaking patience and persistence, a woman could do well for herself. Quite well. A woman could pose a formidable challenge.

Velma was admiring Madge's very handsome if somewhat passé beaded cap, when she interrupted to introduce her mother-in-law, "Lady Bart," a small, stooped old woman who obviously had meant to sneak past but now had to submit to her daughter-in-law's smothering embrace.

"Isn't she sweet," Velma said, smiling with such affection that her lips curled back to reveal gums the color of peat. "She'd fit on a spoon. Wouldn't you like to eat her for dessert!"

Lady Bart, the infamously fretful Lady Bart, four-foot three inches high, seventy-nine years old, was, Madge would soon understand, the key to her own reputation. It took her only a few minutes to see the possibilities contained in this irascible miniature, who looked even smaller than she was because of her bent posture, but whose eyes were huge and seemed to grow larger as she raised her head, the knotty brown irises like liquid spilled on white cloth.

"Catholic, Missus?" Lady Bart wasted no time, and though Velma encouraged her with a nervous giggle to ignore the question, Madge was quick to reply.

"No, as a matter of fact."

She had the distinct sensation that the old woman was trying to frighten her, trying to make herself appear as monstrous as possible. But Madge felt instead a similar fascination to what she had once felt watching the rolling eyes of an unbroken colt that was tied securely in its box stall, felt, too, that she were facing a distorted reflection of herself, perhaps a reflection of what she would become. She didn't recoil, and the old woman, realizing that this stranger was more resistant than most, softened.

"That's all right," she said with a shrug. "All roads lead to God."

From then until Lady Bart's death the following month the old woman and the young widow were committed friends;

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and by the end of the night Murrian Bartholomew no longer considered our grandmother a witch. On the contrary, he believed her to be the cleverest woman he'd ever met, a woman who managed to succeed where dozens of doctors, preachers, herbalists and apothecaries had failed. Our grandmother, against all odds, gave sleep back to Lady Bart.

"She hasn't been well," Velma explained intrusively, stroked the old woman's gray tendrils of hair, smiled at her with affection.

But Lady Bart's story was her own to tell, and she pushed away Velma's hands impatiently. "They think I'm . . ." she said, tapping her temple with her forefinger. "Haven't slept for six months. Six months!" Clearly the old woman considered insomnia her unique talent. What had begun as a sickness had become a triumph—it wasn't that she had lost the ability to sleep, but she had conquered the need, and she never felt as alive, she confessed later, as she did in the lost hours of the night. While the rest of the world slept, Lady Bart kept watch. If she didn't keep watch, who would know how much time had actually passed, or that time had passed at all?

"Can't trust clocks," she warned, taking Madge by the elbow, leading her away while Velma stared after the pair with astonishment and not a little anger. But Madge didn't notice Velma's anger. Tiny Lady Bart demanded her full attention. With a voice that sounded like toast being crumbled and fingers clenched so tightly around her arm that the next day she had bruises above her elbow, the old woman didn't give Madge a chance to hesitate.

In the front hall they took seats at one end of the long deacon's bench, Lady Bart chattering all the while about her remarkable ability. Six months. She hadn't slept for six months, and if Madge didn't believe her there were others who would testify that since July Lady Bart hadn't even dozed. She might have reclined now and then, she might have shut her eyes and folded her hands across her chest, but her senses remained awake. Always alert, always listening.

She had heard the clock in the hall toll every hour of every

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day for the past six months, she had sat through every dusk, midnight and dawn, had listened to rain, to sleet, to branches scratching the windowpane, had finally, after eight decades of ignorance, learned to live and would continue to live, defying sleep, defying death, emancipated, as she put it, from the tyranny of the body. She had rooted out the fear of death and so would not die from fear, which was why most people died—from the unspeakable terror of departure, an exhausting terror that, in fact, shortens life, Lady Bart explained, her lips pursed, stretching the wrinkled skin of her face. Whatever we believe, whatever we think, whatever we attempt, we die—so why live in fear? Fear is blasphemous; through fear, the coward argues with God. Why bother arguing? Purge yourself of fear, and you'll live twice as long or longer, you'll live as long as God wants you to live. St. Narcissus died at the age of one hundred and sixty-five, St. Anthony at one hundred and five, the Hermit Paul at one hundred and thirteen, and St. Simon, the Virgin's nephew, at the age of one hundred and seven and only then because he was martyred. Most people kill themselves gradually, a whiskey in one hand, the supposedly rejuvenating serum of a heifer in the other, both poison, both shocks to the system.

Lady Bart believed that sleep was a shock to the system, the devil's work. How had she come to this conclusion? The problem, our grandmother reasoned, lay at the center of her logic. The old woman believed it her duty to prolong life but worried that if she relaxed for a moment life would be taken from her. Fear, this same blasphemous fear, was the inspiring force behind Lady Bart's insomnia. Afraid to lose control, afraid to sleep, she had disguised her fear as courage and considered herself more noble than others because of her efforts.

Even as Lady Bart prattled on, Madge devised a plan. She listened politely to the old woman's sermon on the near immortality of the terrestrial envelope and then proposed the wager that would mark the beginning of the end for Lady Bart: our grandmother boasted that she could cure any insomniac. If

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Lady Bart agreed to follow her instructions she would, before the hour was up, be fast asleep.

Madge had never tried the mesmeric cure on anyone, nor had she given it much thought in the years since the doctor of Nice had massaged her own neck with his relentlessly seductive fingers. But "progressive relaxation" was as dependable as a tested recipe. If she failed she would leave Spragton and never return, she said—a vow made impulsively and dishonestly. If our grandmother had failed, she would have readily gone back on her word and stayed put. It was useless to try to escape, she knew by then. No matter what, she would dig in her heels and make Spragton her home. She would never run away again.

"You think you can do it?" The old woman gave a short laugh, more like the cough of a small, sickly dog. "You think you can put out the light in here?" She tapped her forehead. "Try! Go ahead, try!" What wicked pleasure Lady Bart took in the dare; how proud she was, this thin, inexhaustible woman who wanted to live forever. But if, as she claimed, she had conquered the need for sleep, the idea still tempted her. Madge tempted, and that afternoon Lady Bart began the slow withdrawal that for six months she had successfully forestalled.

Crafty Ulysses stopped the flow of blood with special incantations; the French physician Corvisart treated the Empress Josephine with pills of breadcrumbs. Somewhere between these extremes of magic and delusion lies the science, or art, of hypnosis. The doctor—our grandfather—had been developing his own peculiar method when Madge was referred to him. Instead of treating his patients with drugs or sending them to costly spas, he believed "progressive relaxation" to be the most effective cure for nervous collpase. "You Must Relax!" became his byword and eventually the title of his book that received international attention. But Madge went to him in the early days of his practice, when he still called his treatments experiments. Madge was one of his most successful experiments. He groped (literally, in the final sessions, with the

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lights off, her blouse unbuttoned) and evolved a method "to quiet the nerve-muscle system, including what is commonly called 'the mind.'"

Obedient, cynical, but vaguely hopeful, Lady Bart followed Madge's instructions, put her feet up on the bench and leaned back until her head rested against our grandmother's thigh. The aim, Madge explained, was "to cease contracting each and every muscle"—the doctor's exact words, and as she repeated them she heard his voice, a disembodied voice, ingeniously persuasive. As she massaged the old woman's scalp she repeated what she heard.

"Trust me. Keep your legs uncrossed and close your eyes gradually, bend your left arm at the elbow, let your hand fall limply from the wrist, now bend your hands backward, now forward, press your wrists against the bench, bend your neck, wrinkle your forehead, frown. Trust me. You are beginning to learn clearly what you must not do. You must relax, but first you must feel the tension, cultivate the muscle sense, understand what the slightest movement entails in order to lie still. Now try to lie still, do as I say, trust me. You don't trust me. If you trusted me you wouldn't blink, keep your eyes closed tightly and breathe when I tell you to breathe, breathe in time with the numbers and keep your eyes shut tightly. Two, three, four—you'd sleep if you trusted me, you don't trust me yet, don't speak, considerable energy is wasted in unnecessary speech, let it go, my dear, let it go. Five, six, seven. See how very simple it is. If you trusted me . . . do you trust me yet? Do you feel the slow spreading outward from the center? The body yearns to expand and finally to dissolve. Let it go. Trust me."

How long it took, Madge couldn't say—maybe thirty minutes, maybe two hours. But the old woman had fallen asleep long before Granny Madge reached one thousand. She stopped counting, searched the oily, lined face for any stirring, but the lips were pressed together, the jaw set willfully, as though sleep were her decision and our grandmother merely an onlooker. But even with this illusion of self-determination

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Lady Bart would from now on be dependent upon Madge as Madge had once been dependent upon the doctor, deceived by him into believing that she could not fall asleep without him, could not, therefore, exist without him.

What a fool she'd been, but never, never again. She was in control this time, the purveyor of mesmeric freedom. She waited contentedly for someone from the party to venture into the hall and find the two women, the sleepless old matriarch at last asleep, her head resting on Madge's lap.

"It's nothing short of a miracle!" This was what they said, and our grandmother became a legend in Spragton, earning on a single afternoon respect that would last through her lifetime. But as if she had been granted one wish, only one, and had spent it on Lady Bart, our grandmother couldn't repeat the cure on anyone else. She tried, for years she tried.

Lately, she's been trying it on her own stubborn self, counting in bed, counting in the bath, counting in her closet with the door shut, the light off. We hear it day and night: the deep breaths and then the monotonous counting, the tedious ascents from one. We know better than to interrupt.

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Stephen Yenser

Blue Guide

I'd like to retire there and do nothing.
—Elizabeth Bishop

On this small island that undoes us daily, gently,
It's hard to take too seriously, too intently
A town whose name means *town*
(As well as *country*, *land*, and *nation*—
Exemplary synecdoche, one notes, even on vacation),
And which has just two buses
(One labors to and from the gritty port,
The other struggles to and from the smaller, higher town),
Each of which, when seen,
As usually, from a hill, inching up a slope or down,
Appears a cross between a donkey and a windup toy.
In cans, no less, the ferry brings in gasoline . . .
(It's hard, too, not to think of *you* in such outskirts . . .)
The gates to miniature courtyards
Before the two-room houses are just two feet high.
The bent and agèd widow in black crêpe,
Her groceries at her hip (as no doubt in her heart a sigh),
Must almost stoop to open them.

The one bus driver, who guides his glossy, truly verdigris
Mercedes from this main town to the country,
Is a kind of hero, according to Sabine
(Whose name rhymes with the French noun *cabinet*,
All that she, German, verb, wild, and self-exiled, seems not to be).
He has no room for error
On his steep way, so ever narrower
It is as though his wheels ran on a track.
They *should* be on a track.

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There are few children of school age here,
And so on any given bus ride the fates of many
Are in his hands, both on the wheel.
From his one rearview mirror dangles
A silken, tangle-tasseled noose of amber worry beads,
A pale and bruised (or smudged) Saint Christopher,
An "eye," or *máti*, as they say in Greek—
Even more circumspectly apotropaic,
With its three ovals of white paint
Around the oval smalt glass bead recalling the Graeae.
Into an indentation in his dash
(Where a clock would go, if there were time)
Someone has pasted Jesus as a sugary shepherd.
In tourist season he'll pack thirty souls
Into this vehicle whose capacity, so its doors state,
Is fourteen. Now and then, the van must stop, must wait
For a herd of goats or a straggle of donkeys and *their* driver
To let it have the oxbow in the road.

When he is at the helm he does not smoke,
Though lounging in the shady square in Chóra
(*Chóra* . . . *chóra* . . . in the *Timaeus* womb and home
Of everything that moves and changes form),
Where he seems so out of his element, alert
And nervy as a sailor after his long voyage,
Ears plugged with last year's Walkman,
He works his beads through like a penitent and smokes,
Smokes like a fuse . . . But he never jokes,
And one cannot imagine him, unlike the town's
Other several Kostases (Kostádes?),
Sipping an endless watered ouzo,
Of an evening, whose sweet cloudiness,
The product of opposing clarities,
He can't afford the licorice vestiges of—
The lickerish, languid, lackadaisical effects of.
So when Iríni, lost in her twelve-year-old dreams of love,
Doesn't disembark, he knows—and calls her forth.

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He has black, curly hair, thick as with suint, a thick moustache.
Vigilant, he wears dark, dark sunglasses with thin gold rims
Against the vigilant sun.

The other driver—like his van's springs—is bouncier.
He has a smile that shows off one gold eyetooth.
He has his amulets as well: a gilt cross,
A pair of fuzzy dice, elephantoid, a string of olive beads,
And then—isn't it?—a ceramic garlic bulb.
His bus is two-tone: jaded yellow over faded brown.
He drives toward sunrise, as Kóstas toward sunset.
And back, of course—they both drive back,
Each to his end of town.

One never sees the two together.
But they are brothers—maybe twins, but *unmistakably* they're brothers—
Even here where everyone's related.
Unless there are not really two of them.
So could there be one brother, as it were, in different modes?
If there are two, the one who flashes glinting smiles
And has a three-note horn he blows on his arrival
Has neatly lettered advertisements in his van:
"Hotel Odysseas," "Atalantides Souvenirs," "Caïque from Yannis"
(Calligraphy in the same hand).
There are no solicitations in the other bus,
There being no place visitors would want to stay, so many miles
From any shop, though there are still some residents
In the high village, its dwellings clinging to the road.
(For centuries the governments have made it the abode
Of favorite scapegoat dissidents.
It's one thing that this unknown place is known for.
One thing I think of *your* approving in it,
This isle that's still an exile,
Come to seem the perfect home

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For certain types, who wouldn't—couldn't—change,
And yet who *needed* change, demanded *change* . . .)
Dimítrios makes change. Dispenses tickets—
After the ride, in careful trade for fare—
As though his ride alone were not worth 20 cents.

Our dourer driver does not deal out useless stubs.
He will provide directions,
Since there are several paths that lead off from his road.
There is the path to Déndro, or Tree, where on some days
On the horizon islands ride at anchor in a lavender haze
(Itself a product of opposing clarities),
And other days in the penumbra of the sky and sea
The only island that an eye can see
Is the idea of an island, forming for the very gaze,
Rather like *idea* in the Attic verb *to see*,
Precipitating itself, viewed as though through gauze,
As vague as *its* Greek source through *tiffany*.

Another path leads to Angáli, and then, beyond some rocks,
There's a sliver of a beach where, on any given day,
The hiker might find Sabine.
A sort of tutelary spirit, ageless,
Although by now pure body, like a fish,
She eats the island's bread and bitter olives,
Drinks its *rāki*, knows its coverts for the night,
And walks barefoot as though in boots
Through donkey dung and loose sharp rock.
Suddenly she stood,
In surfsuds washing ankle bracelets,
Browned all over, blonde hair sunbleached wheat and white,
Facing the sun, hands piling her hair up—
And when she turned, tufts of shining copper filaments.

There is the path to Zoodóchos Pýgi, the Church of the Fountain of Life,

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A chastened venue, blued, sparely furnished—
No blind mouths here—
Although the name, when said aloud,
Calls up an animal, a stuffed (or stuffy) cartoon character.
There has to be as well a path to that white chapel,
Distant, guarded on one side
By what must be the island's only six Italian cypresses.
It looks like *the* local example, oddly estranged,
Of architecture ecclesiastical.
But then when one can't find it on the map at all,
It seems it was a crisp mirage.

Some paths fray out in scrub and friable hardscrabble.
Life is tough, says the thistle—and the furze says so too.
(Life is tough, the stone groans back, as the plants squeeze through.)

And there's a broad path to the Church of Pandeleíman,
Cobbled with stones the shades of almonds and pistachios.
As smooth as used soap bars,
As sucked-on lozenges, and sweetly modulated,
They make the spirit's dry mouth water for watercolors.
The church itself is painful white in sun,
And in the wind the courtyard's two bay laurels
Happily make their gull-like noises,
And dry leaves scramble crablike back and forth
Across the old stones outlined freshly with white paint.

The wind gusts up there, scented with sage, or thyme,
And blows away like gossip on the square.

Zigzagging up from Chóra there's the path to the Panaghía,
The church of the Madonna, perched above all else,
In daylight irresistible as a Carême meringue,
Within whose shadow for a moment one might think—
So this is where I've always meant to be:
Near these eroding ruins of a Venetian aerie,

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At cliff's edge, just above where someone, not long ago,
Risking a neck to do it, built a little course of stones,
And set an orange crate in it.
And this is where I want to stay (so one might think),
Spying, or overseeing, really, *speculating*,
Essentially *episcopal*, and therefore *skeptical*,
Painting, drafting, drifting off in misty blue,
Doing the nothing special,
The special nothing one was born and bred to do.
Surrounded by outcroppings splashed with lichen,
Orange, pinkish, gray, and charcoal
(Or thriving, aging, dying, dead),
Among the goat turds like large coffee beans,
Letting the wind flip through *Geography III*
(Since I'd have nothing if not time),
I'd watch the azure sea
Turn up like plowed-down sillions in white water,
Muse on the mazy alleys down in town,
Follow a thought beyond that shotgun blast of bougainvillea,
Sudden and unanswerable as a ruptured aneurysm,
Beyond the very corner first
Turned—when? thirty years ago by now?—
That juncture where I slipped somehow
Into this iridescent bubble of the future
Waiting itself to burst . . .

And I would know how in the notebook
Were seeds of all the verse I'd ever want to make,
The poems it would take forever to have made,
Not one day more or less,
Poems modeled on the Wandering Islands,
A constellation of them, like the Kykládes, but in motion,
An archipelago loosely kaleidoscopic
Called sometimes "Neighborhood of a Point,"
Sometimes—less mathematically—"The Klitórides," or
"Little Hills" . . .

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How slow the evening is down there, beneath the Panaghía,
Where by now the chickens turn on their rotisseries,
*Pop*ping, *pop*ping—like the men out shooting trigónia;
Where, later deep in his taverna, Níkos clears up mysteries
(*Ah, naí, tó nekrotapheío*—the cemetery);
Where next door to my house a single workman paves
A courtyard with that seastone that's a kind of glaucous slate,
The Aegean's color on a cloudy day (with ingrained waves).
One family specializes in the cutting of it in the north
And in the southern shaping of it into those thin plates.
How quiet everything is here,
As quiet as the deepened light.
If you could scoop a little of it up—the light, the quiet—
The lucid color of a sapphire of first water
Like water in your hands . . .

But then, always before you're ready for it,
It is dark. It is dark . . .

Though if you stay there long enough you might meet Sabine.
If you do, maybe she'll go with you,
As the stucco glows brighter and colder,
Through the gates, and show you how to climb the church,
And where to lie down on the dome
(By now the whitewash is like sculpted snow,
Her burnished tones, by moonlight, a moontan),
And pick out patterns that the stars pick out.
What happens next is always pure improvisation.

Before departing, take the green bus out to its last stop,
Where Kóstas can point out an extravagant path
That finally reaches the island's tip,
Ambéli, or Vineyard,
Paradise at the world's end,
With tiny gardens lifted from the *Georgics*—
Gardens quite distinct (like the Islands of the Blessèd
In the Age of Gold, when *death* meant sleep as rich as honey,

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When *food* meant honey, fruit, and vegetables),
Gardens of persimmon, quince, edged with shady olive trees
(The olive trees unpaintable, indeed, unprintable,
Moving in the barest breeze
As though a rain were falling silkily—
Although it's not: see, there are Vergil's bees),
Grape vines, melons, sweetcorn, while bamboo sweeps the sky,
Sweet water runs on the surface, small frogs jump,
And (I swear) cows graze—and one crow always sits on one cow's rump
(Unless the crows take turns).
And from the beach (since here there's always time)
You must swim to the caverns,
As quickly cold as death, to cadge from Sabine,
Who takes you in to where,
As in some mad Cyclopic ear, black water gurgles,
Sloshes, slaps, and echoes, re-echoes . . .

But it's a matchless brilliant of a bay
You gasp back out to, the beach no bigger than a minute
(As someone in the family used to say),
Wherein the water's bezel of beryl green,
The blues our small Earth is from lunar vantage, marine
Mixed with milori, maybe, or blue turquoise—or is it
Berlin blue? or Brunswick blue?
Or since from my own point of view
The changing hue is so somehow suffused with you,
Bishop blue—is flat exquisite.

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Portfolio

DRAWINGS

Medrie MacPhee

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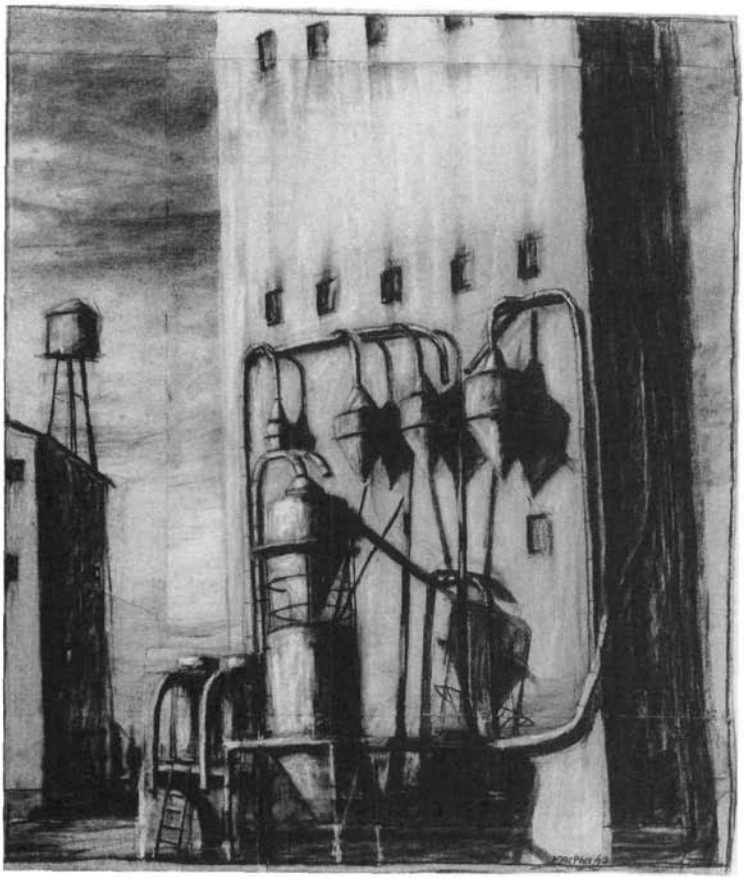

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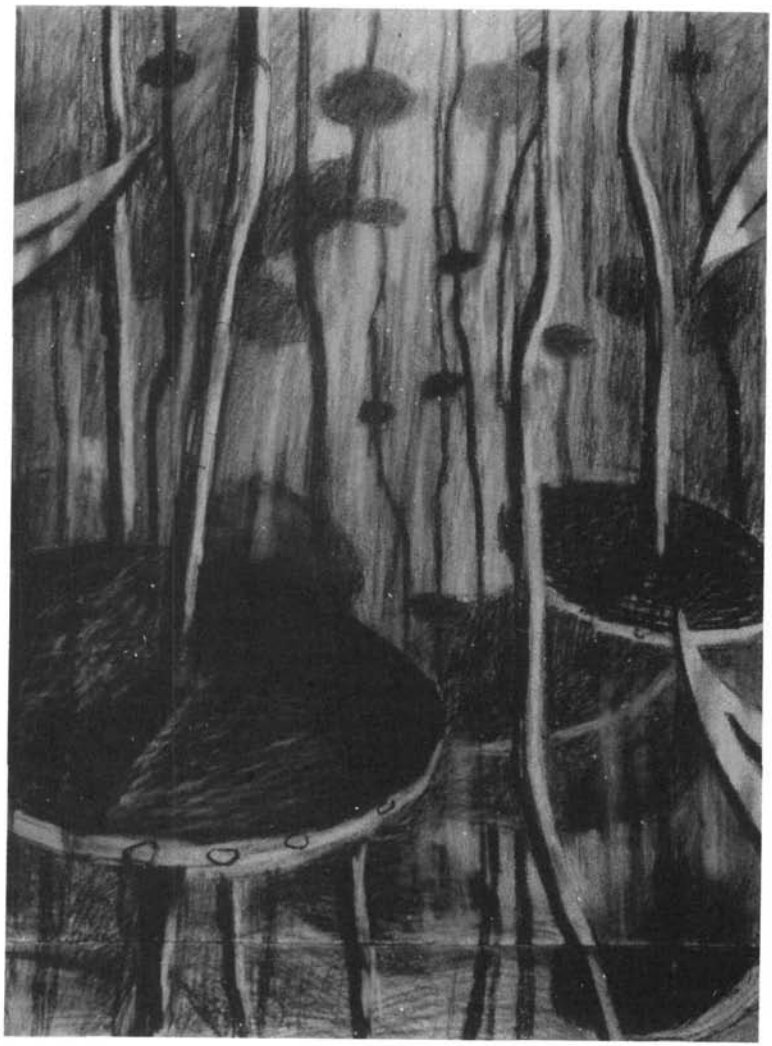

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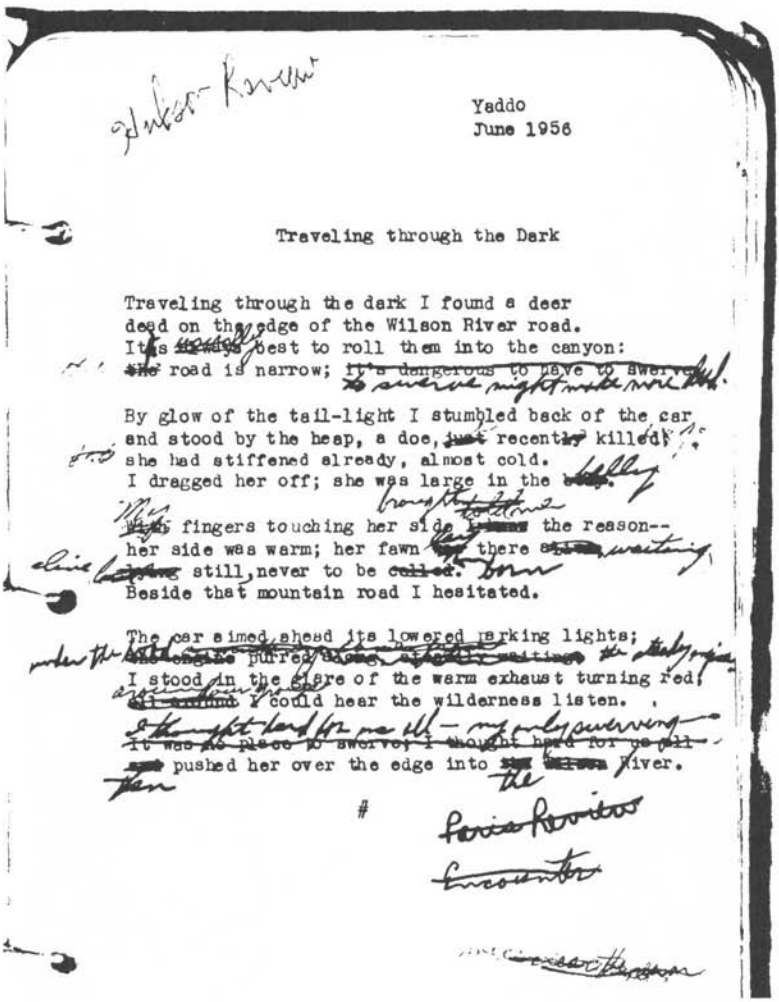

Yaddo
June 1956

Traveling through the Dark

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is best to roll them into the canyon:
road is narrow; it's dangerous to pull to swerve.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, recently killed;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side felt the reason--
her side was warm; her fawn there waiting,
still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
I could hear the wilderness listen.
It was no place to swerve; I thought hard for us all--
pushed her over the edge into the river.

#

Paris Review

William Stafford's son, Kim, sent us this manuscript page with the following note: "He wrote the poem at Yaddo, then sent it to many magazines. The Paris Review *is one of almost a dozen who rejected what eventually became the title poem in his collection,* Traveling through the Dark, *which won the National Book Award in 1962. I believe my father would have enjoyed the irony, as I hope you do, of this poem appearing in this form in* Paris Review *lo these thirty-five years later."*

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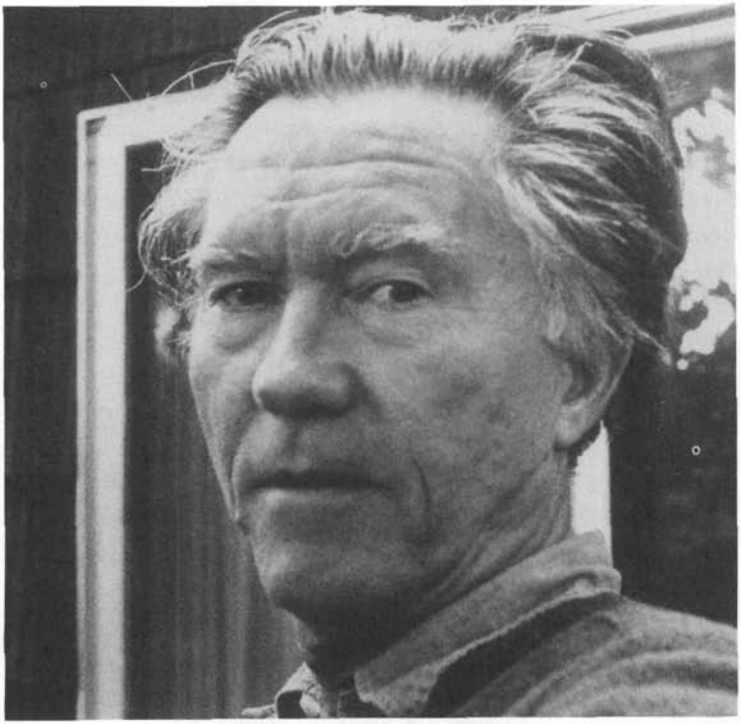

William Stafford

The Art of Poetry LXVII

The intimacy of William Stafford's poetry would seem to belie the enormous popularity the poet's work has enjoyed, but in fact it is a product of Stafford's keen ability to discern poetic language in everyday speech and appropriate it for his own work. Stafford, whose first volume of poetry was not published until 1960, when he was forty-six, was born in the small town of Hutchinson, Kansas on January 17, 1914 and died in Portland, Oregon on August 28, 1993 at the age of seventy-nine.

After taking his bachelor's degree at the University of Kansas in 1937, he spent most of World War II in government intern-

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ment camps for conscientious objectors. He worked as a laborer in sugar-beet fields, at an oil refinery and for the United States Forest Service. His novel Down in My Heart *(1947) is a fictionalized account of his experiences as a wartime firefighter, construction worker and, finally, as a staffer at the Church of the Brethren in Illinois. In 1955 Stafford completed a Ph.D. in literature and creative writing at the University of Iowa. His first volume of poetry was* West of Your City. Traveling through the Dark, *his third collection (A facsimile manuscript page of the title poem appears on the first page of this interview.), won the 1962 National Book Award.*

Stafford wrote over fifteen books in his thirty-three-year publishing career, making him one of the country's most prolific poets. His books include the poetry collections Stories That Could Be True: New and Collected Poems *(1977),* An Oregon Message *(1987), and* Passwords *(1991) and two widely read books on the writer's vocation,* Writing the Australian Crawl *(1978) and* You Must Revise Your Life *(1986). He served as Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress in 1970 and 1971 and has received many literary prizes and honors, including the Shelley Memorial Award, the Award in Literature of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and a Guggenheim Fellowship.*

Stafford taught at Lewis and Clark College in Portland from 1960 to 1978 and, until his death, made his home in nearby Lake Oswego. This interview was conducted over two days in an elementary-school classroom in Cannon Beach, Oregon, where the 1989 Haystack Writer's Workshop was taking place. Stafford and his son, the writer Kim Stafford, were there jointly conducting a workshop on writing poetry and lyrical prose. During the conference, Stafford carried a camera around with him, frequently stopping to take pictures. For the interview, we sat in school desks across from each other. Stafford wore a plain white cotton shirt, open at the collar and loose, unpressed cotton pants. He had a broad, somewhat owlish face, his self-effacing manner and appearance in sharp contrast with his fiercely independent nature.

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INTERVIEWER

In his essay on James Wright, Richard Hugo wrote, "The luckiest thing that ever happened to me was the obscurity I wrote in for many years." Do you feel similarly about your own late-blooming career as a poet?

WILLIAM STAFFORD

I think I understand what Hugo was getting at: that you are ambitious when you start and if you have a whiff of success you try to rush things; for publication's sake you try to rush it all the more; then the ordinary slumps in popularity and intervals when you're not publishing become overwhelming simply because you haven't gotten used to doing what you have to do as a writer: write day in and day out no matter what happens.

INTERVIEWER

In your poem "A Living," you write there is "a way to act human in these years the stars/ look past." What kept you from responding in more extreme ways, more "human" ways . . . did you feel like the stars were looking past you during certain years?

STAFFORD

In that poem at least I was thinking about the feelings many people have of tension, of questioning about survival, of the hovering of the atom bomb, all kinds of disquiets that people have in our times. I think I was referring to that more than to my personal experience. In fact, I had early and sustained publication, every bit that I deserved. I never did feel left out for any reason. I felt pretty lucky.

INTERVIEWER

In another essay, Hugo places you among writers he labels "Snopeses," a reference to the Yoknapatawpha County family from Faulkner. These writers, he speculates, are basically outsiders and thus are afraid success will cause them to lose touch with other outsiders.

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STAFFORD

I understand Hugo's impulse to stay in touch with outsiders. He was a natural outsider. But on the other hand he couldn't *be* an outsider; he was taken in by everybody; they loved him. He was addicted to sociability, helplessly social. And he was addicted to or available to the heartiness of interchange among writers. He enjoyed company and sympathy and liked to extend sympathy. He especially valued that feeling of kinship with people who were failures or outsiders. My own feeling is that I'm not sure what being an outsider amounts to. Maybe some of us *should* be outsiders. I'm not sure by any means that I deserve to be an insider, whatever that would be. Maybe one feels neglected only if one has an opinion of one's rightful place, and I don't have that opinion. That's up to the world.

INTERVIEWER

Have many of your friends been writers?

STAFFORD

Not very many. Because of living so long and traveling around I've met many writers, and I enjoy meeting them. Hugo is an example. He used to come and stay at our house. We were always delighted to have him. But in my daily life I don't live in proximity with, or in daily, person-to-person communication with, writers at all. When I write, writers don't see what I write, only editors. My family doesn't see it either.

INTERVIEWER

So you don't exchange poems with writers?

STAFFORD

No. Well, it's possible. Hugo has actually written me, in the breezy way he had of ending a letter, "What does the earth say, oh sage?" I would always write something back to him. In one particular poem, "The Earth Says This," I took up the challenge. But that was very rare.

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INTERVIEWER

There's a sense of being at home in the world in your poems. And you've said as much explicitly. The insecurities many writers seem to feel, especially in the twentieth century, seem somewhat absent from your work?

STAFFORD

I do feel at home in the world. I have genuinely felt throughout my life a sense that any acceptance of what I write is a bonus, a gift from other people. It's not something that's due me. When any editor has a place for some of my work, that's fine, but I always send that stamped return envelope. I'm genuinely ready for those rejections. I've always felt that an editor's role is to get the best possible material for the readers of the publication, not to serve the writer, not at all. If they don't want it, I don't want them to have it. So I never have felt that I needed to push this stuff into the world. If it's invited in, then it will come in. If it's not invited in, fine, it will live at home.

INTERVIEWER

Did you always have this sense of belonging to the world? On more than one occasion you've referred to a certain moment riding a bicycle out to the Cimarron River. . . .

STAFFORD

Yes, occasions like that. It was an occasion for the free, clear realization of this prevalent feeling I had. My parents welcomed me; our towns were good places; I liked my teachers; I went to whatever church was around—for the sociability mostly, but also because I took seriously what they were doing. It was only after I was a graduate student, maybe beyond graduate school, that I took seriously writers like Sherwood Anderson who were writing about the desperation of the small town. I never felt that. I thought that was the way everybody lived.

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INTERVIEWER

Why do you take such an optimistic view? We know what can go on in small American towns—bleak things.

STAFFORD

Optimistic? My view of the small town is realistic, at least it is to me. Every town had great views, an arch of clear sky, a wonderful variety of people, fascinating things going on all the time. And in every town we lived in, there was one great big door ready to open for anyone—the library. And I never met a library I didn't like.

INTERVIEWER

Weren't the times in Kansas during the depression, when your family had to move around a good deal, difficult for you?

STAFFORD

Well, it was tough in the sense that my father didn't have a job, and we didn't know what we were going to do. We were living partly on what I could earn selling papers and so on, but so far as I could tell that was what being a human being was. I don't know how to get this directly and simply enough, but if you think about it, lots of human beings don't have a job, lots of human beings work in the sugar-beet fields, which I did. There are a lot of happy people working in sugar-beet fields. And I was one of them. You know, you could always crawl into the shade. You had lunch, maybe a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich—delicious. The feeling of being alive and relishing your food and drink and company is available anywhere. Some of the most hilarious moments of my life took place while I was interred at a camp for conscientious objectors. Someone would get a box of brownies from home or something, and it was a banquet.

INTERVIEWER

Even though you liked the place where you grew up, you left home eventually.

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STAFFORD

Oh well, I went to other places because I was forced to: I was drafted; they made me go. It took World War II to get me out of Kansas. I was going to the University of Kansas graduate school, and the draft board said, "Go." First Arkansas, then California, then Illinois, and it ended by my traveling a lot, yes. I'm an illustration of Newton's laws: the object at rest tends to stay at rest, unless compelled by some energy to go elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you become a conscientious objector?

STAFFORD

Strangely, I didn't become one; I always was one. I thought all right-thinking people would behave that way. In those days, the 1930s, the peace movement was strong in America. In fact, Franklin Roosevelt, to get elected, had to promise, "No war." The other people changed, and I was surprised. I thought a commitment was a commitment. There were peace people everywhere, in all countries, and I was not about to break ranks with that worldwide fellowship.

INTERVIEWER

In your book, *Down in My Heart*, you write out of a need to continue a conversation with George, a conscientious objector you knew who wound up in prison because of his beliefs. Do you generally feel as though you're entering into some sort of conversation when you write?

STAFFORD

I do often feel that kind of connection with the reader. I like being straight across from the reader, communicating with a peer—not preaching to someone or worshiping someone, but talking to an equal. I don't want to give the impression that this is something I've elected; I just feel that way. I feel the possibility of resentment if I'm demeaned by talking up

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to someone. And I am apprehensive about patting people on the head. Instead, it's a back and forth with the people in your town, in your street, in the field where you're working, or the camp where you are. Just this afternoon my son, Kim, was talking about the ethical problems of writing a nonfiction piece about another person. I wanted to interrupt and say the obligation I feel is to the people I'm writing *to*. I don't feel the need to be as careful about people I'm writing about, though it would disquiet me if I were putting out advice or signals that lead someone into ways of life I would consider harmful to them or to others. It would make a difference to me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a sense of conversing with dead poets?

STAFFORD

No, I don't. I converse with live poems. It doesn't make any difference—it sounds like a brutal thing—to me whether the authors are alive or dead. It's their poems I'm reading. Thomas Hardy and Wordsworth are appealing to me, and I feel that I am in their presence. I read the best I can get wherever it is. I don't care how long ago it was written.

INTERVIEWER

You don't feel a sense of competition with writers you read?

STAFFORD

No, it's not like that. We all seek out the kind of reading that we are available for, that we are capable of. There are writers from whose work I get only a very thin part of the signal; I'm not getting the full treatment when I read Pascal or Descartes, but I have a taste for it . . .

INTERVIEWER

In an early poem of yours, "Bi-Focal," you write: "So, the world happens twice— / once what we see it as; / second it

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legends itself / deep, the way it is." Does a good poem, to your mind, give us something of both happenings—that surface and that deep or philosophical side?

STAFFORD

I certainly hadn't thought of it in such a neatly categorical way, but I think that's right. The appetite for reading or listening or learning—seeking out meanings—is an attempt to get beyond superficial, beyond appearances, to realize what is significant. The senses are fallible, and of course our minds are fallible, and I don't have the belief in my ability or anyone's ability to get very far beyond appearances, but again, I have the appetite for it . . . like, I don't think we ever find out what things are really like, but trying to get nearer is a hunger.

INTERVIEWER

To what extent do religious beliefs influence your work? Do you consider yourself a Christian poet?

STAFFORD

I might describe myself as a religious poet whose vocabulary, reference points and surrounding culture are phrased in Christian terms. I think I would be whatever religion there was in the society around me; it's not the local content of the religion that possesses me, but the general attitude, the way of living that recognizes more than we know.

INTERVIEWER

There's a sense of great space in your poems. Would you trace that to growing up in Kansas?

STAFFORD

I sometimes have thought about that, yes. In our world at least half of the world was sky; that is the way I've sometimes phrased it to myself. I mean, there's the land, but it isn't as big as the sky. Someone told me a wonderful story about a

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woman who came out from Nebraska and wanted to see the Pacific Ocean. The motel person said: "Yes, you can see it if you walk down to the end of the road." This visitor stood there a few moments on the beach, and then walked back, and the motel person said: "What do you think of it?" And she said, "Well, it's all right, but I can't help but think it isn't as big as I thought it would be." This was the Pacific Ocean! Well, she was from Nebraska, I know about that. That's the biggest thing there is—the sky! It's there, and it's an abiding puzzle, presence and invitation.

INTERVIEWER

To what extent is poetry autobiographical?

STAFFORD

It doesn't seem to me that my own poems are at all reliable as links to the events of my life. Anyone's poetry could give clues to the writer's life, to the writer's way of living, to general tendencies and attitudes. As the years go by, I sense whole phases of life getting themselves woven into my writing, like a tide: waves are chance things, but the tide has whelming significance.

INTERVIEWER

Are there aspects of your childhood that you think may have contributed to your becoming a poet?

STAFFORD

There are emblematic things. For instance, my father worked for the telephone company. He told me about hearing, when he was a kid, that there was a new invention that enabled you to talk to someone far away. And he climbed up on the roof of his family's house and called out to people far away—trying to do long distance without the telephone. It was only much later that I thought that's a wonderful sort of symbol for his attempt to get in touch. I had the same feeling. You know, I'd like to get up on the roof of the house—sort of like

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the barbaric yawp—to get in touch. My father had that feeling and that confidence—misplaced maybe—but he had it and I had it too. Stanley Kunitz once said to me that he had advised Robert Lowell not to go to the White House when Johnson was president, and I think Stanley saw a little flickering expression on my face while he was talking. So he said, "You wouldn't go, would you, Bill?" And I said, "Yes, I'd *like* to talk to Johnson." I had the feeling of confidence that the language can take us somewhere. I would like to talk to anyone willing to talk.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the poetic line in America is somewhat more horizontal than vertical, that there's openness and expansiveness which is distinctly American?

STAFFORD

I'm not sure I'm following you on this but I'd like to try. The resources in language and the adventures in writing are available to us—I don't want to echo Wordsworth on this—in the language we use everyday, though it is not necessarily that of ordinary people in whatever circle we inhabit. We may not be with ordinary people (I'd like to be with extraordinary people, myself.), but it would be the language they use not when they are writing but when they are talking, when they are saying things like, "Pass the butter." Bonuses in language are not literary bonuses; they are available to everyone who flourishes the language every day with people who are their peers in communication. It would be a mistake to try to heighten or lower my place in the language that comes to me. Instead, I try to accept whatever fluency and fluidity is possible at my level of understanding with my kind of people. To do it artificially, to try to hype myself into being a better writer by doggedly reading better literature, is also a mistake. I learn to use the language by the pleasures it gives me when I am able to swim in it or maneuver in it or interchange in it with the people around me.

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INTERVIEWER

Another Northwest writer, Raymond Carver, is known as someone who has written about the people around him, the people he grew up with, and is considered something of "a poet of the ordinary." Do you think there's anything to growing up west of the Mississippi that encourages such an approach?

STAFFORD

I know Raymond Carver's work very well and knew him, and I see the point of what you're saying, but I have a feeling that Carver was deliberately—when you consider his ability—doing the language of partly handicapped people, of people who were limited in their understanding. This was his genius; he got the poignancy of their lives out of the level of language. But as for myself, I would like to associate the degree of fluency in language that I'm capable of. I'm not looking for literary effects by cultivating a kind of language from above. I'm looking for straight across communication, as I said before.

INTERVIEWER

Not cultivated from below either.

STAFFORD

Nor from below. I got a charge out of some of Raymond Carver's writing, but I don't feel comfortable myself in cultivating the language of a group I'm not naturally with.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel a special affinity for a certain poetic tradition?

STAFFORD

I suppose so. Generally, I like a tradition that is fairly serious, that is sustained . . . strangely, in view of my own production, I like big works. I like long things. Most influential for me has been prose. All kinds of big prose things. I worshipped George Eliot. I like big novels. And I like nineteenth-century British novels very well. Starting with Sir Walter Scott.

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INTERVIEWER

Why have you never taken on a long poem?

STAFFORD

All of my writings are one long production. I break off pieces, smaller or larger, and send them out. Sometime I will get around to welding the pieces together. It's as if I am distracted in building a big house; I hurry over to prop up a wall with one piece of writing, then have to drop everything to save a joist somewhere else. This is just the feeling I have, not a claim. I'd like to connect big pieces together and have epics.

INTERVIEWER

In your own reading do you often return to poets of the nineteenth century?

STAFFORD

I can't say that I have recently. When I was starting to teach, say in the fifties, I had a volume of the collected works of Wordsworth that I read religiously from end to end, including the prose. And got a lot out of it. I liked it. I loved it in fact. But I've read so many of those nineteenth-century poets that I've gone on to other things these days.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any American writers you are especially fond of?

STAFFORD

The short answer has to be no. For some reason, I find myself (except for rapid scanning of many current things) attracted to distant and often past writers—Kierkegaard, Pascal, Nietzsche, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Tolstoy. A good thing about reading is that you can rove. You don't have to be provincial, no matter where you live.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you see yourself in a particular line, in a naturalistic or romantic tradition?

STAFFORD

I can't tell. Could be. But I feel enticed by all kinds of topics. I don't feel as though I'm in a bag.

INTERVIEWER

You've said you believe that language is social. Is this related to your interest in Wittgenstein's ideas about language?

STAFFORD

Oh yes, everything makes a difference in reading: the kind of ink it's in, where it starts on the page, everything. I feel like a scanner programmed to pick up whatever is on the page when I read. Wittgenstein has an abiding interest in language, so it's natural that a writer would be interested in what he said. I certainly am. But that's just as a human who is curious. I don't read these people in order to write. I don't do anything in order to write. I don't believe in reading so that I'll be well-read and a better writer. It seems a fake thing to me to read a novel in order to become a better writer. It turns into something that's not a novel. Besides, a novel is something you read by your appetite. That has to be true for anything I read; if I don't have the appetite for it, then it's not for me. I don't do it as a duty. And I don't want anyone to read me as a duty, for heaven's sake.

INTERVIEWER

Quite a lot of attention has been paid recently to northwestern writers such as yourself, Carver, Hugo. Was Robin Skelton's *Five Poets of the Pacific Northwest* a catalyst in bringing attention to writers from this region of the country?

STAFFORD

When that book came out I was glad to be one of the five and felt good about the others who were in the book. On the

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other hand, I think the book itself was probably more of a recognition of something that had already happened; it didn't bring anything new to pass. In some ways it was a long overdue book. That sounds grandiose, but it didn't occur to me at the time that it was going to do anything special for us anywhere else but in that region.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there is any accounting for the Northwest renaissance of the last twenty-five years or so?

STAFFORD

I don't have a feeling either of renaissance or its opposite. Our country is so fluid for travel and access that a regional recognition is more a matter of convenience than it is any kind of valid movement. There are simply more people in the Northwest than there used to be, so there are probably a few more writers.

INTERVIEWER

So you don't think there is a special meditative quality to the Northwest that might contribute to writing?

STAFFORD

Well, I have to take a breath when I respond to that because I don't like to plunge into water I haven't checked the depth of. As a matter of fact, I *don't* think there is anything especially meditative about Northwest writing. But maybe I'm so near to it that I don't feel the current; I just go bobbing along with everybody else.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel Theodore Roethke's influence once you moved to Oregon?

STAFFORD

Strangely, it's hard enough for me to be definite about that. It was only later, after I'd been writing for a long time, that

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I read any Theodore Roethke at all. He was influential with so many at the University of Washington, and it's assumed that everyone in the Northwest is influenced by Roethke. I guess I sort of sneaked in by the side door and didn't know what was going on.

INTERVIEWER

Do *you* see his influence in the work of other Northwest writers?

STAFFORD

Many do tell me they are influenced by him. Surely Roethke must have given people around him a surge of confidence and ambition about the language, about how it can dance and live by extreme claims of relationship and feelings.

INTERVIEWER

Did you get to know him?

STAFFORD

I met him a couple times; you know, short conversations.

INTERVIEWER

Were your years at the University of Iowa the first time you were among a group of writers?

STAFFORD

Yes. I had always been interested in reading and writing and had met writers, but I can't remember people other than newspaper reporters and a few teachers who were regular writers. I wasn't really in a community of writers until I reached Iowa.

INTERVIEWER

Was that a good two years?

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STAFFORD

I liked it. I always say, "I served happy time at Iowa." It was rich with a variety of writers. We were made to feel that writing was a worthy thing to do. That was most encouraging. I've heard many kinds of reactions to Iowa, but my own reaction was quite positive. I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER

It wasn't too incestuous? Everyone wasn't expected to write a certain kind of poem?

STAFFORD

Well, it was only later that I began to hear that that was what happened. That happens at any writers colony, where people influence each other. Looking back, I do see in the workshop there were certain prevalent opinions, but they were not by any means all Paul Engle's. There were others there who were quite opinionated.

INTERVIEWER

I remember a statement of yours about not being interested in master-disciple relationships.

STAFFORD

Yes, I have a feeling that art is something you do yourself, and that any time you turn the decisions over to someone else you're postponing, at best, your own development. The atmosphere of the workshop should be that of trying out one's own work and accepting the signals from others but not accepting the dictation of others because that is a violation of the spirit of art. Art can't be done by somebody else, it has got to be done by the artist.

INTERVIEWER

Has Oregon been a good place for you? A good place to get your work done?

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STAFFORD

I think it has been a fine place for me. I have no negatives about it: I even like the rain. But it's also been good in the way that obscurity was good for Hugo. Whenever I've traveled to a place where there are many writers and the reverberation is intense—say New York City—I have felt some need to get away. It is just that if I stayed, my urge toward sociability would lead to many distractions. In the Northwest you're at Yaddo all the time. You don't have to get a grant to be in a place where you won't be troubled by the distractions. Some writers feel they have to escape to this by getting a grant. I hope this doesn't divert any money from the Northwest, but that's a feeling of mine: being in the Northwest is like one long Guggenheim.

INTERVIEWER

Even more than sight, sound seems central to your poems, for instance in "Owls at the Shakespeare Festival." Is there a relation between sight and distraction?

STAFFORD

Yeah, that's interesting to me. Sound is something I'm very conscious of. And maybe that's part of the Northwest; there is a mossy, deadened sound here. So you listen more carefully: you're an owl. You don't have to put on earmuffs to keep from damaging your hearing. It's nice and quiet, so you listen. But in a way that's a metaphor too. It is an alertness of sense in a world where senses are never enough—any of the senses. I thought maybe you were going to say smell. I feel I'm really a good smeller, and I value that, although on the other hand, I look at a bloodhound and realize I've got a ways to go. So, whatever the senses in my poems, I am consciously aware of the limits of human beings and of the mistake we make if we assume what we are receiving is everything that's there. I feel that we need to hear more, see more, smell more, feel more.

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INTERVIEWER

James Dickey made a comment about your saying amazing things in your poems without raising your voice, as though you were "murmuring." But were you ever tempted to raise your voice?

STAFFORD

No, I was not. I have always felt that a raised voice was a mistake, in the sixties or anytime. And in a way this is congruent with other parts of my life like the conscientious objection in World War II. I thought that, yes, I would like to go talk to Johnson, not stand outside hurling insults. Somehow communication implies hearing as well as saying; it implies listening; it implies understanding. And intellectual life in general implies a lot of intake, not just output. So that seems congruent with other parts of my life, to be murmuring. A murmur's enough.

INTERVIEWER

Was there a way in which the sixties changed your life or your poems?

STAFFORD

The sixties changed my life because it made poets very popular; poets traveled around the country. It enhanced the kind of popularity that had been growing. Economically, my life has greatly benefited from the popularity of writers and readings and workshops. The flourishing is manifested at workshops too. Many people come, having realized that writing is an access route to their deeper selves. I've felt and heard others talk about this fact, that many people who come to workshop sessions are like refugees from that world out there—the reverberating world.

INTERVIEWER

Have poetry readings changed the landscape of contemporary poetry?

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STAFFORD

Yes, I think so. Recently I've come to realize that for many people the reading of their own poems to a group is a kind of breakthrough. It's a kind of achievement of participation in society. Apparently that's important. I didn't feel it myself, partly because readings didn't become popular until after I'd been writing for a long time. By then my pattern was already set, and I didn't feel elation about reading. I just felt that if they were ready to hear it, I was ready to read it. If they want to pay me, great; it means I'll travel well.

INTERVIEWER

When you do give a reading do you feel a responsibility to read "Traveling through the Dark"?

STAFFORD

No. I don't think I've read that poem for twenty years without it being requested. I don't feel I'm avoiding it, but it's not the kind of poem that especially interests me. Teachers tell me, and I believe them—I'm not trying to claim anything for it—that it's a good conversation starter in a class. I'm glad for that. But it isn't the kind of poem that I feel took me anywhere; I know how to write that kind of poem. I'm more interested in the ones I don't know how to write.

INTERVIEWER

Have you shifted from technique-centered verse to voice-centered verse in the course of your career?

STAFFORD

In the early fifties, I think it was, someone asked me to review a book about William Carlos Williams . . . and so I did, I read the work, thought about it, and I didn't think I was learning anything. I was already on that stream, I felt very much at home. Back home in Kansas in the thirties we would read *Spoon River Anthology*, which are brief, sort of prosy, vignettes of human beings; we delighted in them. It's

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a strange thing, the pessimism delighted us. I mean, "Petit, The Poet" and so on. Anne Rutledge and her stiff-arming of degenerate sons and daughters and so on . . . we liked that, and we thought that was *just*; it didn't depress us because it was so much fun to read. Well, as I say in one of my later poems about my mother and me, how we loved our town, how we chewed on its hard, tough rind and loved its flavor. There is feeling in some of the early, non-technical, non-metrical, non-rhymed language—language the way you hear it—that we liked.

INTERVIEWER

Did you make a conscious decision to change the way you wrote?

STAFFORD

I don't think any other way ever occurred to me than to write the best I could. Intellectually, I saw that one could try to be Swinburne, if one wanted to, and I did some things like that, but I always felt the satisfaction in writing was in entering the realm of communication with an equal use of the language of common people.

INTERVIEWER

You do take up traditional forms occasionally, though not as often as, say, Philip Larkin, with whom you share an interest in both narrative and the use of the vernacular.

STAFFORD

Yes, and I love his tough rind, his tough flavor. He seems quite bleak to many people, but I don't disagree with his point of view at all. Somehow I feel okay about it. The world is such a zestful place, even in its bleakness. Sometimes I've thought about what it would be like living in a country that said, "We're going to send you to Siberia." My feeling would be, "Well great—Siberia, that's that place where, you know, all sorts of things happen." I suppose this is perversion, but

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I think I'm the kind of person who thrives on surmounting obstacles, the camp-in-the-snow type.

INTERVIEWER

But many people were sent to Siberia to die or to live out their lives in exile.

STAFFORD

Oh yes. There are extremes we cannot survive, extremes that crush the spirit, or almost do. That "almost" is important to me; we *can* continue to make distinctions wherever we are. Some concentration camps are better than others; I even got a whiff of that during World War II. Sometimes we danced in the barracks.

INTERVIEWER

To go back to poetic form, you've mentioned the importance of prose for you as a writer. Perhaps prosaic qualities allow a toughness foreign to a Swinburnian style. Yet many of your poems scan and rhyme. How does a poetic form announce itself to you?

STAFFORD

I think two ways. It is quite possible for me to shift gears and decide to write a form. It has never seemed to me like a very difficult thing to do. But then sometimes I find myself, in my daily writing, drifting into an area where I feel the form hovering near what I've already naturally started to write. I'm quite capable of cultivating it. But for me the line break is something that's discovered as you move across the page; with any line you come to places where you get a gain or a bonus by breaking the sequence. I look for these bonuses. And if a bonus doesn't come along about four or five stresses into the line I create it. I mean I create the bonuses, by juggling the order of sentences or something like that. I don't try to *keep* from writing in a form. When you first said, "Well, you do write in forms," I thought that does sound like a violation of

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what I was saying about just talking across the table to someone. When I was a little kid, my parents would read me Robert Louis Stevenson, Kipling . . . formal things, mostly. So I was imbued with, penetrated with, those forms. They never felt foreign to me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any feelings about the so-called new formalism? The view among some younger poets that free verse is a bit played out, or overplayed.

STAFFORD

I do have a reaction to that. A poet like Richard Wilbur has been going along for years, steadily, doing these elegant forms. I have felt the quality in what he has written, and often I feel totally committed to what he is doing. I don't feel thrown off a bit. But there are many poems that I find scattered around in magazines that just don't feel like *enough*. Okay, they've got a rhyme, they've got a meter, but I don't feel the delight in it. It's got to have more. For whatever reason, I don't think I will ever feel the surge of delight in a poem just because it's in a form. And if I have the feeling it's in a form by the sacrifice of something else that I can almost glimpse, then I feel it is a disaster.

INTERVIEWER

Do young poets you meet today have as good an understanding of craft and technique as poets did when you were starting to publish?

STAFFORD

Maybe not, but they've got something else much more important. They believe it's possible to get the whole tide of their feelings and lives into the language that comes naturally to them, which is much more than the young poets had when I was starting to write. My own feeling is that the technical study of forms is not worthy of the time that writers are able

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to spend together in most workshops, considering the other things that we can do. A person can read a book if they want, and practice the forms on their own. It's like taking beginning Spanish in graduate school so that you can fill a language requirement. Sure, it's good to know Spanish, but you shouldn't have to do it in graduate school. It's a distraction, I feel, in a serious workshop to go back to describing what a sonnet is. That's not to say that you couldn't practice them; that's different. But to come to a writer's workshop in order to learn what a sonnet is seems like a waste of money.

INTERVIEWER

You're well known not only as a poet but also as a theoretician and teacher of the writing process. Have these activities had much effect on the way you write poetry?

STAFFORD

Sometimes I think they have. And I don't feel good about that. My first impulse is to confess that I feel that I'm such a veteran of teaching writing that I can't get lost in a workshop; it's a natural, it's like breathing to me. Which is not to say that I don't feel nervous. I don't feel comfortable letting my theorizing in a writing workshop influence the free, onward feeling of my writing. I want to be ignorant all over again when I start writing. I don't want to incorporate into the early stages of my writing process the laboriously achieved, step-by-step analysis that takes place sometimes in a workshop. I don't want that to have anything to do with my writing process. It makes me nervous. I may have sacrificed my instinctual self by teaching writing: I can't tell.

INTERVIEWER

Do you usually do several versions of a poem?

STAFFORD

Yes, I do. I write fast. I've been labeled by some as being a poet who writes too easily and therefore gets out a lot of

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junk. However, things that interest me I go back over. I do not feel committed to the idea that my work is perfect without my going back over it. Sometimes I go back over it many, many times. No matter how many times I go over it I don't ever feel that it's finished or that it has settled into what Yeats suggested: it clicks and therefore it's correct. I don't think that correctness or absolute rightness is in the realm of human possibility. So work is always revisable, as far as I'm concerned.

INTERVIEWER

Despite the fact that you've travelled all over the world there isn't a great deal of exotica in your work. Why is that?

STAFFORD

I remember when I was traveling in Pakistan someone asked, "Are you writing while you're traveling?" I said, "Yes." "Are you writing about Pakistan?" I was able to say yes, but I didn't want them to ask me more because at the time I was working on a poem about the patterns of cracks on the ceilings in hotel rooms in Pakistan. It was so immediate that it wasn't exotic. You know, there are cracks on the ceilings of hotel rooms in Cannon Beach, Oregon. So, I was at home. So much so that I wasn't a foreign traveler writing about an exotic place. I was a human being writing about his shelter for the night.

INTERVIEWER

Has translating the works of others influenced your own work?

STAFFORD

It doesn't feel like writing to me. It's like doing a puzzle. There is a kind of satisfaction, but it's a different feeling from writing my own work. A lot of the inducement, the motivation for writing is the discovery of the whole pattern. On the other hand, if you're running out of steam with your own writing, or you think you want to practice doing those adroit things that will redeem the subject matter shoveled onto the page,

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you can have those adventures working through the process of translation. But that's a long way from feeling the way you feel when you're writing your own things.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a sense of your development as a poet?

STAFFORD

I don't feel much urgency to analyze a line of development. It's foreign to my feeling about the process of writing. I remember reading that Auden said the problem for writers as they grow older is the fear of repeating oneself. I felt let down by this. I believed Auden was exploring whatever came to him wherever it might lead, and then I find that he is deliberately cultivating variety in order to either reach new readers or attain some kind of eminence as a poet. That doesn't interest me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a sense of having accomplished what you set out to do?

STAFFORD

No. Not at all. This may sound brutal, but I don't cherish the poems that are done. I cherish the poems that are coming. I'd sacrifice all the poems of the past for whatever is coming up. It's not a feeling of either satisfaction, or progress, or defending them. As far as I'm concerned, they're in the world to make a living for themselves if they can do it. I'm not going to do anything for them.

INTERVIEWER

You put together a collection of your poems though.

STAFFORD

Actually Harper and Row made the move about that. I think they decided, "Well, there are all these books, they're sort of in print, why not put them all together." There was

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an earlier book of mine they hadn't printed. That seemed fine to me.

INTERVIEWER

Your most recent book of prose is called *You Must Revise Your Life*. Did you have in mind some difference between revising your life and Rilke's injunction to "change"?

STAFFORD

I intended the reverberation with Rilke. I thought, this is sort of fun. I didn't try to disguise it at all. I thought that readers who know Rilke will say, "Ah, yeah, here we go." I wanted to use the word *revise* because so many books about writing make it sound as though you create a good poem by tinkering with the poem you're working on. I think you create a good poem by revising your life . . . by living the kind of life that enables good poems to come about. It's much more productive, much more healthful, to feel you are embarked on a writing career in which the way you live your life has something to do with the kind of poems you write. I'm not suggesting being a kind of doomed poet—"I'll drink myself to death in order to write brilliant poems"—I don't believe in that at all! So I wanted to address all that. And I wanted that resonance in the title: the echo of Rilke, and the strong assertion that writing good poems is more than revising the one you have in hand. Your life is a trajectory. A workshop may seem, to those who take part in it, a chance to revise the work they bring. I think it's a chance to see how your life can be changed . . . so that poem that began to come will be more satisfying, more fulfilling.

INTERVIEWER

Is poetry a way "to bring strangers together," as you imply in your poem "Passwords"?

STAFFORD

I remember writing that poem. I like to say things like that to see whether they'll fly. That poem didn't come out of

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conviction. It was more like an experiment: how do I feel about this? Well, I think language does bring us together. Fragile and misleading as it is, it's the best communication we've got, and poetry is language at its most intense and potentially fulfilling. Poems do bring people together. And not just the people who come to a workshop. But everybody—they are addicts of poetry without knowing it. Walking down the street, someone comes out of church and says, "Oh, Bill, hello, been writing? How come people don't pay any attention to poetry these days?" When they've just been in church with hundreds of people reciting the Psalms in responsive readings, singing the songs, responding to the rhymes in the hymns. They are addicted to it. They're victims of it. And yet they come out and say, "How come people aren't interested in poetry?" It's because they've compartmentalized their minds. Maybe it's our fault that they feel that poems only appear in literary magazines. Poetry is everywhere. Here I am preaching about it. Oh yes, I think it brings people together. When they go to church and they hear, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love," and so on, they're into poetry.

—William Young

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Two Poems by Nicholas Christopher

Terminus

Here is a piece of required reading
at the end of our century
the end of a millenium that began with the crusades

The transcript of an interview
between a Red Cross doctor
and a Muslim girl in Bosnia
twelve years old
who described her rape by men
calling themselves soldiers
different men every night one after the other
six seven eight of them
for a week
while she was chained by the neck
to a bed in her former schoolhouse
where she saw her parents and her brothers
have their throats slit and tongues cut out
where her sister-in-law
nineteen years old and nursing her baby
was also raped night after night
until she dared to beg for water
because her milk had run dry
at which point one of the men
tore the child from her arms
and as if he were "cutting an ear of corn"
(the girl's words)
lopped off the child's head
with a hunting knife
tossed it into the mother's lap
and raped the girl again
slapping her face

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smearing it with her nephew's blood
and then shot the mother
who had begun to shriek
with the head wide-eyed in her lap
shoving his gun into her mouth
and firing twice

All of this recounted to the doctor
in a monotone
a near whisper in a tent
beside an icy river
where the girl had turned up frostbitten
wearing only a soiled slip
her hair yanked out
her teeth broken

All the history you've ever read
tells you this is what men do
this is only a sliver of the reflection
of the beast
who is a fixture of human history
and the places you heard of as a boy
that were his latest stalking grounds
Auschwitz Dachau Treblinka
and the names of their dead
and their numberless dead whose names have vanished
each day now find their rolls swelled
with kindred souls
new names new numbers
from towns and villages
that have been scorched from the map

1993 may as well be 1943
and it should be clear now
that the beast in his many guises
the flags and vestments
in which he wraps himself

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and the elaborate titles he assumes
can never be outrun

As that girl with the broken teeth
loaded into an ambulance
strapped down on a stretcher
so she wouldn't claw her own face
will never outrun him
no matter where she goes
solitary or lost in a crowd
the line she follows
however straight or crooked
will always lead her back to that room
like the chamber at the bottom
of Hell in the Koran
where the Zaqqūm tree grows
watered by scalding rains
"bearing fruit like devils' heads"

In not giving her name
someone has noted at the end
of the transcript that the girl herself
could not or would not recall it
and then describes her as a survivor

Which of course is from the Latin
meaning to live on
to outlive others

I would not have used that word

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The Hyperboreans

The Hyperboreans—"people beyond the North Wind"—
according to Diodorus Siculus, inhabited an island
from which the moon "appears to be but a little
distance from the earth and to have upon it
prominences, like those of the earth," easily visible.

Some believed this island to be England, home
of Thomas Harriot, the first lunar cartographer,
and botanist to Ralegh's Virginia expedition
in 1586, two thousand years after the Hyperboreans
disappeared from the annals of history.

Herodotus mentions a tribe even farther north,
of one-eyed men and griffons who guard hoards
of gold in ice fortresses and "make war upon the ice"
during their long winters when "the ground is frozen
iron-hard," requiring, not water, but fire to soften it.

Long before John Davis plied Arctic waters, word
had reached these two Greek historians, who had
never ventured north of the Black Sea, that there
was such a people, skilled in fishing through ice,
and hunting in darkness, who slept on their feet.

The snow around them so thick, Herodotus reported,
that it was described to him as an "unceasing wind
filled with feathers"; and Diodorus (who had never
seen snow) referred to it as a "great cloud shredded
by the North Wind." Today, hurtling northward in

our hearts at breakneck speed, we have outdistanced
all previous tribes, walking the planet's starry
rim like a tightrope with the pocked moon close
enough to touch. It was another Englishman,
Sir Thomas Browne (born when Davis and Harriot

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were old men), who chose for his meditation on
death and the underworld, *Hydriotaphia (Urne-Buriall)*—
which is dense with digressions on the psychology
of arches and obelisks, and astral nomenclature
(with special attention to the *Dogge-Starre*),

and the fact that Roman colonists in Britain,
when they left off torturing and dispossessing
the resident Saxons also taught them the art
of minting coins—a fittingly Hyperborean epigraph,
icy in its simplicity, by yet another citizen

of the sunny south: the line of verse Sextus
Propertius, in 15 B.C., had etched onto
the urn that would hold his ashes—white as
mountain snow—in the catacombs of Rome,
"See, I am now what can be lifted with five fingers."

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Two Poems by Jacqueline Osherow

Eight Months Pregnant in July, High Noon, Segesta

Segesta . . . seems to have been founded in 12C BC by the Elymni. . . . It was rapidly Hellenised, however, and was in continual warfare with Selinunte from 580 onwards, seeking the alliance of Athens in 426. After the destruction of Selinunte in 409 Segesta became a subject-ally of Carthage, and was saved by Himilco (397) from the attacks of Dionysius of Syracuse. In 307, however, Agathocles sacked the city, killed 10,000 of its inhabitants. . . . It was finally destroyed in the 10C by the Saracens.

—The Blue Guide to Sicily

". . . Tell me, Selig, please, what does this word Venus *mean?" asked Hayim.*

". . . remember the strange looking man who appeared a week ago wearing an apron and a red cap, the one who sold licorice cookies and other such things for practically nothing?"

"Yes, so?"

"He was a Greek and there is a whole group of people called Greeks."

"And they all sell licorice cookies?"

"Don't be silly, they have their own land: Greece. . . . They once were a very strong and learned people. . . . And even though they were very learned and knew how to paint, sculpt, carve, and appreciate fine things, they were nothing but idol worshippers serving false gods."

—"Venus and Shulamith" by I. L. Peretz

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It was foolish planning to arrive at noon
But, in retrospect, it doesn't really matter.
There was a bar, after all, where we bought water
And my husband bought a sun hat for the daughter
We dared not bring, exposed, into that sun
And I thought I'd make it another joke-legend:
Eight months pregnant in July, high noon, Segesta,
The people at the bar agreeing, "She's American,"
Which from them was less judgmental than amused.

It *was* hard climbing in the stifling heat
With my enormous belly up that hill
But, probably, the belly stood me well.
How do you approach a recluse temple?
I'd have lost myself as obsolete
If not for my peculiar role as conduit,
Conducting the implausible, attended air
On a circuit of an inaccessible heart
As if the god they built the temple for

Might leave those tiny, rumbling chambers streaked
With razzmatazz extracted from the stars
Or some other godly gift, say, lunar poise
If it's Artemis (they don't know which it is);
Usually, I bargained for *intact*
In my absurd negotiations on this subject
But resting, lopsided, against a pillar,
I let its sprawled dimensions contradict
Whatever truce I'd made with hope and failure.

I'd never guessed that air could fuse with stone,
That in some miserly and parched terrain
Meagerness could bare the way for rapture.
Once, according to my book, a city flourished there,
So large it lost ten thousand in one massacre
But all I saw was emptiness and temple
And a tourist bus, apparently jammed with people,

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Ascending the next hillside on its noonday trip
To the long-lived amphitheater at the top.

You certainly couldn't say that time absolves
The atrocities that must have happened there;
Chronology was messy there as everywhere
And, surely, saw to more than that one massacre
As successions of invaders made their moves
But among the things that this Segesta proves
Is that, whatever else we are, we're also dreamers
And sometimes it's our dreaming that survives.
It might just turn out that we're late bloomers

Who could learn something, after all, from history.
I, of course, was desperate to believe this,
Enormous as I was with one of us,
Beside the child in sun hat on the stingy grass
Begging for something like the Io story
Which explained (at Agrigento's Temple of Hera)
How the peacock's feather gained its watchful eye.
I said, inaccurately, that somewhere near
A boy's dissolving wings gave up the sky.

I lied and said he swam his way to shore.
The truth is I know little of these legends
As a child I had no patience for their nonsense—
People turning into bears and swans . . .
I preferred the reckless child dreamer
(Feared by sun, moon, sheaf of wheat and star)
Who cracked the ciphers of the steward's vine,
The lethal basket headdress of the baker,
The seven unforgiving ears of corn.

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I liked, in other words, to hear true stories—
A woman laughing at the child she carries,
A twin embezzling blessings from a twin,
Blood, frogs, locusts, wild beasts, murrain,
The fact that if the sea would part again
I'd be with those culled to wander through—
I luxuriated in their lulling Hebrew
Unraveling in my ears as they were sung
With the murky splendor of a holy tongue.

The first I heard of ancient Greece was *Hellenist*
Which meant that someone like my grandmother
(Who waited every Shabbos for her Irish neighbor
To tune her in to WQXR
And Milton Cross's weekly opera broadcast)
Would, in Hellenistic times, have been coerced
Herself to turn the opera broadcast on
And give up the women's section's weekly feast
Of gossip in a din of praying men.

I assumed that she'd have braced to die
Like the martyr Hannah and her seven sons.
In Hebrew School, they made us model partisans,
Avoiding obstacles like art and science,
Architecture, drama, epic poetry.
My father did try to push the *Odyssey*
But I objected to the plot as too ridiculous.
In the middle of a war, what lunatic city
Would welcome an enormous man-made horse?

I still have trouble with that section
(I suppose I've retained my childish prejudice)
And much prefer the episodes with obvious

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If out-of-context likenesses to Exodus:
You simply turn the desert into ocean,
The golden calf to oxen of the sun,
And marvel how, despite their years of roaming,
The lost, inveterate nomads still don't learn
The underrated art of coming home

Wherever, as the poet wonders, *that may be*.
In my case, it certainly isn't Sicily,
Though Sicily is not unlike the luckless spot
Where my erratic people got their start—
Same sea, same sirocco, same near-desert,
Same oranges, same capers, same persimmons,
Same centuries of parallel invasions.
The Sicilians weathered theirs with more aplomb,
Acquiring, besides Greek temples, floors from Rome

With fish, reptiles, mammals, cupids, gods
And string-bikinied gymnasts in mosaic;
A hill or two berserk with high Baroque;
And Saracen palaces whose windows arc
Like spiraled dancers' palms above their heads;
And then there are the rash, elaborate hybrids
(Part Byzantine, part Arab, part Romanesque)
Whipped up by Normans bored between crusades
To counter any stray, leftover mosque.

This, too, was one of our alternate histories:
How, first, they slew us infidels at home,
Then went to look for others in Jerusalem;
We were taught, that is, to side with Islam
In the erudite and forward-thinking days
When the Sultan's court physician was Maimonides;
We never heard a word about the spice trade,
The sudden taste for silk, the open east,
And learned to regard the term *crusade*

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For any kind of philanthropic enterprise
As a threat, like *B.C.*, in our adopted language.
Sicilians don't appear to have such baggage;
Odd for people said to hold a grudge.
Do I envy them? Well, it would be pointless
And, in some ways, they've wound up just like us
In adjacent, noisy neighborhoods in Brooklyn
(Of course, the route they took was less circuitous),
The Bronx, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston,

Then outward to suburbs, for the driven ones,
Some even to houses whose exaggerated lawns
Set off immense façades of pillared porticos
Traceable, backwards, from their grandiose
Contractors through slavers' mock Palladios
(By way of old-world gentry's stately homes)
To the Renaissance obsession with ancient Rome's
Facsimiles of places like Segesta . . .
They're better off in Larchmont than Segesta

And yet—but I've been planning this *and yet*,
As if it might recover every page
Or work, at least, a retroactive camouflage
To take my more egregious errors hostage.
There ought to be more here than this *and yet*
It's not as if I'd say I haven't meant it.
That air did seem to me like other air;
It *could* have graced an unknown infant grazed by it;
I had to disregard that ancient war

But the past will never teach me what it knows;
It won't get by the hurdle of what's beautiful.
From post-Nazi recordings all I could tell
Was that their prima donna sounded like an angel.
I'd have listened if she hadn't been the Nazis',
Grateful, probably, for such a voice
If it belonged to less familiar horrors.
I'd love to learn from history, but whose?
How do I get past these angled mirrors?

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Not to mention the bias of what remains
When it ought to be what's lost to us that's precious.
I'm remembering my mother's uncle's *alles*
As he held a family photograph from Czernowitz
(Forty people spanning generations
Squandered—each one—in a matter of instants)
And the German tourists in the shul at Prague
Examining my civilization's remnants.
Old men told me Hitler left that synagogue

Precisely so that such a visit could happen.
One way or another, destroyers win.
I suppose that's why we've honed their art so well.
I, at least, have photographs, a wall
But there are those with nothing left at all
Unless you count their breath's transfigured air.
Not even mounds of shoes, eyeglasses, hair.
Surely some of them were given to dream?
Who knows what famished stars bowed down to them?

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Mural from the Temple of Longing Thither

after Paul Klee

In Klee's "Mural from the Temple of Longing"
Thick, dark arrows from each skyscraper window
Head "thither" in opposite directions, into
Skies to which at once the sun and moon
Entice like come-ons to a thronged bazaar.
The arrows whisper, *this is what you are*
And I, who've never liked this sort of thing,
Acknowledge what I'm seeing as my own.
Who can say which is its darkest wound?
That all this frenzied wanting never stops?
That mine are such indulged, such meager, sorrows?
Or that I've known such eloquence in arrows?
How these crude weapons, these traffic cops
Suspend so effortlessly my beyond.

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Daniel Hall

Bartholomew's Cobble

> *In theory one is aware that the earth revolves, but in practice one does not perceive it, the ground upon which one treads seems not to move, and one can rest assured. So it is with Time in one's life.*
>
> —Marcel Proust
> **Within a Budding Grove**

Another cow was floating by us,
hilariously calm, bell-deep
in milkweed and tansy. She looked
right through us, until we felt
transparent, the bright blue light
more substantial than the two
shades rocking our canoe. Is it Lethe
or nepenthe eases pain, and which
erases memory? —Another day
of clues and lapses, ramifying
puzzles to be set and solved:
memory, pain. . . . A meander swung us
round under an overhang
of karst, rain-runnelled, grotesque,
a manageable, mini-Guilin
—about the scale, to tell the truth,
China had shrunk back to by then.
What is the *Gui*, some kind of
flower, cassia, maybe, "cassia wood."
Like petals, those terraced paddies

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we saw from the air; toylike,
the water buffalo. . . . Still no word
from X or Y—surely their visas
must be up? Floating back down
the River Li (no Housatonic,
you muttered), one of us remembered
the date, and the conjunction
of the new moon and Mars
we'd noted in Celestial Calendar
before leaving America.
We dashed out to the upper deck
to have it driven home to us
exactly where we were—the pair
a hand apart and moving fast:
twelve hours, twelve thousand miles,
what did they mean? And I asked,
when you asked, What *is* karst,
What's a cobble? Every other answer
either I don't know or
I've forgotten. —A far *clock*
of cowbell. And another. Another.

July, 1989

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Two Poems by Phillis Levin

The Afterimage

Once in the sweet dark of an empty house,
All alone while the others slept upstairs,
I knelt before a memorial candle
And cupping it in my hands began to stare.
It was a chance to be close to fire, to hold
Its heat and power, for I was drawn to it,
Young enough to lose myself in light,
Old enough to know that what I did
Was unusual though simple for a child.
Someone must have died in late autumn
On the day lit by the candle, and perhaps
Long ago, on that day too, shadows
Of branches swayed on this gray wall,
But death did not concern me then
Or life as I know it now.
In a few years
The dearest light to me would be a face
Floating in the dark above the stairs,
But I was still a stranger to desire
And love an undiscovered hemisphere.
What I found that night I always carry
With me, its meaning inscrutable yet clear.
I followed the flame before my eyes,
Knowing I could not blink, not knowing
What would follow, and then I stood up
And slowly started moving about the house,
The flame before me, although the candle
Was on the table. How did I carry it?
In my eyes, which were bright and burning.

That night I dwelt with the flame
And it became the unfolding leaf of time.

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Soon the faithful image of the original
Began to change, blooming from yellow
And red to violet and green, clustering
Into viridian, indigo, ultramarine.
A perfect illusion, I thought, this flame
Swimming in space, flaring from shade
To shade, suspended, suspending me
Between detachment and wonder:
A phenomenon of nature, no miracle
At all (already I questioned the easy
Mysticism of my classmates), the result
Of having a human eye and a longing
That led me to a flame.
As I walked
Through the dark, rainbow after rainbow
Appeared, lighting my way up the stairs.
I was so tired, I wanted to close my eyes
But I didn't want to lose the vision
And I knew it depended on my sight.
At last I lay in bed, my eyes on fire,
My body water, the flame dissolving
Through me—flakes of color drifting
Down a stream. And from that day forth,
Even when a flood brought me beyond
All land, into the deepest night, a prism
Inside of me has held the sun's plumage,
The afterimage in which I write.

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Strophe

Achilles is tired of crying.
It occurs to him
one day in June
he may not have the courage
to act like Patroclus,
that is, to be himself
on a battlefield
receiving his blood and name.

Patroclus was most himself
when disguised as Achilles
he rose from the tent
to stand in the sun,
forsaking his death
in the armor of another,
for Achilles does not know
what it means to be

Achilles, and Patroclus
does not know
that his ruined body
will kill a god, who wakes
to find himself human,
with nothing in the world
but futile power and the taste
of what cannot return.

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The Stubborn Porridge

Wang Meng

Wang Meng, one of China's most influential post-revolutionary writers, came to international literary prominence after overcoming twenty years of internal exile in forced labor camps. Labeled a "rightist" in 1957 when he was in his early twenties after he had published a short story mildly critical of the government bureaucracy, Wang Meng was banned from writing and spent the next two decades in and out of thought-reform-through-manual-labor camps. He finally ended up in the remote region of Xinjiang in western China. Undaunted, he set himself to learn the local Uighur language through attending mass ritualistic recitations of Mao's quotations. Having learned the language, he was later able to translate Uighur writing into Mandarin Chinese. Later, he incorporated his experiences in the Xinjiang region into the series of highly regarded stories and sketches known as the Yili Interlude.

In 1979, following the death of Mao and the launching of the Deng Era of Reform and Opening-Up, Wang Meng was rehabilitated as a professional writer; he was one of the best known and most innovative figures in contemporary Chinese fiction. Once classified as an "enemy" by the government, he

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was appointed minister of culture in 1986. "Now I am loaded down with more and more work," Wang said at the time. "I have less and less time for myself, but I will never put down my pen." And he never did. While serving as Minister of Culture, Wang Meng wrote outstanding fiction as well as literary criticism. His name has been widely associated with the introduction of the stream of consciousness into Chinese narrative technique. His work introduced parody in the guise of the mock-heroic antics of an absurdist protagonist named Chairman Maimaiti. The travails of Chairman Maimaiti were the precursor of Wang's celebrated story "The Stubborn Porridge" published here for the first time in English. The story originally appeared in The Chinese Writer *early in 1989 and won the Hundred Flowers Literary Prize of 1990/1991.*

Following the June 4, 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement in Tiananmen Square, Wang Meng stepped down from office. Soon after he was attacked in the government-controlled press. The September 14 edition of Wenyi Bao, *the official hard-line newspaper of the Writer's Union, printed a letter to the editor supposedly decoding "The Stubborn Porridge." The anonymous letter claimed that while purporting to be a story about the disastrous reform of a family menu, "The Stubborn Porridge" was actually an attack on Deng and his reforms. The letter claimed that Wang's story suspiciously coincided with the "clamor of a handful of people who persisted in bourgeois liberalization and advocated the conversion of public ownership into private ownership." To further make its case the letter also quoted a Taiwanese source as saying that the story was a "veiled satire of the Chinese Communist system under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping."*

Wang Meng immediately wrote a sharp rebuttal to the paper claiming that the letter was a political frame-up, reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution. He questioned the motive of the letter writer in arbitrarily linking Deng's name to a distorted interpretation of his text. He also demanded an apology and that measures be taken to dispel the adverse publicity, plus

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payment for damages. When he received no reply, Wang Meng, in an unprecedented move for a writer in a country known for stringent censorship of the arts, particularly considering the recent crackdowns, decided to sue the anonymous letter writer and the editor-in-chief of Wenyi Bao *(believed by some in the Chinese intellectual community to be one and the same) for libel.*

Despite the media attention, the Intermediary Court of Beijing refused to handle the case, claiming that the whole affair was just a debate "between different points of view" and did not warrant a civil suit. Reportedly, the Central Committee Propoganda Department then issued an order to China's newspapers banning them from reporting on the lawsuit. But several newspapers ignored the ban and reported on the controversy, triggering what became known as "Porridge-mania" across China and creating a huge demand for copies of "The Stubborn Porridge." Articles began cropping up in newspapers and magazines nationwide examining porridge from every conceivable angle. It is in that spirit that we present Wang Meng's "The Stubborn Porridge."

The official members of our family are: Grandfather, Grandmother, Father, Mother, Uncle, Aunt, I, my Wife, my First Cousin on my Father's side, my First Cousin's Husband and my lovely, lanky Son. Our ages are respectively eighty-eight, eighty-four, sixty-three, sixty-four, sixty-one, fifty-seven, forty, forty and sixteen. An ideal ladder-like structure. And then we have an unofficial member, unofficial but indispensable—our housekeeper, Elder Sister Xu, age fifty-nine. She has been with us for forty years, and we all call her Elder Sister Xu. A clear case of all men born equal with natural rights.

We lived together peaceably, united as one. On all issues big and small, such as whether this summer is hotter than usual, whether to drink Dragon's Well tea at eight yuan an ounce or green tea at forty fen an ounce, or which brand of soap to use—the gentle Violet or the intimidating Golden

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Armor—Grandfather had the last word. Strifes and contentions, overflowing rhetoric and behind-doors plotting were absolutely unheard of. We even shared the same hairstyle, distinguishing between male and female, of course.

For the last several decades, we all got up at ten past six in the morning. At 6:35 Elder Sister Xu would have our breakfast ready: toasted slices of steamed bread, thin rice porridge, pickled turnip heads. At ten past seven we would all set out, respectively to work or to school. Grandfather had already retired, but still showed up every morning at the Neighborhood Committee as officer on duty. We all came back at twelve. By then Elder Sister Xu would have lunch waiting for us, bean-curd paste noodles. After a short nap, we would all get up at one thirty and start off again, respectively to work or to school. Grandfather, however, slept until half-past three. Then he would get up, wash his face and clean his teeth for the second time and sit on the sofa to read the newspapers. At around five, Grandfather and Grandmother and Elder Sister Xu would have a consultation about the menu for supper. This was a daily routine, which never lost its interest for the three participants although the results never changed from one day to the next. Let's say rice for supper tonight. As to dishes, let's make it one meat, one half-meat half-vegetable and two vegetables. As to soup, let's skip it today. Or let's have soup today. After this discussion, Elder Sister Xu would go into the kitchen and get down to work, chopping away. Thirty minutes later she was bound to pop out: "To think that I could have forgotten! I had not asked about the pork in the half-meat half-vegetable. Should it be sliced or shredded?" Well, there is no denying the importance of the issue. Grandfather and Grandmother looked at each other significantly, and one of them would say: "Might as well be sliced." Or they might say: "Let's make it shredded." And their decision would be faithfully implemented.

Everybody was satisfied with this life, Grandfather first and foremost. Grandfather had suffered in his youth and would often admonish us: "A full stomach, unpatched clothes, good

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health, a well furnished home and all the generations living together—why, this is even beyond the dreams of landlords in the old days. Now you people, don't let it go to your heads. What do you know of the pangs of hunger?" But Father and Mother and Uncle and Aunt would protest that they knew full well the pangs of hunger. When you are hungry, they said, your chest and stomach go into constrictions, your head dangles, your legs wobble. They added that extreme hunger felt the same as overeating, you want to throw up. Our whole family, headed by Grandfather and Grandmother, were followers of the maxim that happiness lies in contentedness and were faithful upholders of the existing system of things.

But lately, things have been changing. We were constantly assailed by new fads and fashions. Just within the last few years, a color TV, a refrigerator and a washing machine had made their way into our home. Besides, my Son's speeches were often interspersed with English. Grandfather was most liberal and open-minded, garnering a stock of new terms from the papers after his daily nap or from radio and TV programs after supper. He would often take a poll of public opinion. "Now is there anything to be reformed or improved in our family life?" he would ask.

Everybody would hasten to say no, especially Elder Sister Xu. She prayed that this kind of life would go unchanged from day to day, year to year, generation to generation without end. My Son came up with a proposal. He blinked hard as if there was a worm inside his eyes. He proposed that we buy a cassette recorder. Grandfather agreed, acting on the principle that heeding advice led to the attainment of perfection. So there was an addition to our family belongings in the shape of a Red Lamp brand cassette recorder. At the beginning we were all thrilled. One would say a few words, another sing snatches of Peking opera, this one would imitate a cat's meowing while another would read a passage from the papers, and we would tape it and play it back. How we enjoyed it all! And to think that Grandfather's father and grandfather had never known the existence of such a thing as a cassette recorder.

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But after the first few days, the thing began to pall. The songs on cassette, which we played on the machine did not sound as nice as those on radio or TV. The cassette recorder was put aside to collect dust. Everybody realized that these new gadgets had their limitations after all. They were not as durable as the old "song box." Nothing could take the place of tradition, nothing could compare with order and harmony within the family.

That same year, the uneventful pace of our family life was ruffled by an order canceling the long noon break for napping, to be replaced by a short forty to sixty minute break. The compensation was that each work unit must provide free lunch. A mixed blessing for us, however. We were glad for the free lunch but nevertheless distressed by the change; we just could not adjust. After two days of free lunch, we were all affected with constipation and other symptoms of the Heat Syndrome. Then it was announced that free lunch would be canceled, and we were left wondering what was going on anyway. What were we to do? Grandfather admonished us always to take the lead in keeping on the path shown to us by the government. So there was a big hassle over buying lunch boxes, preparing lunch and taking them along to the office. Elder Sister Xu suffered from insomnia, toothache, eye infection and accelerated heartbeat. It wasn't long before some work units prolonged the noon break. Others did not officially revert to the long noon break but surreptitiously put off the start of the afternoon work-hour without staying later to make up for it. Our family reverted to our lunch of bean-curd paste noodles. Elder Sister Xu was immediately cured of all her complaints, no more eye infections, no more toothache; her sleep was on schedule, and her heartbeat under perfect control at seventy to eighty beats a minute.

But the surging waves of reform rolled onwards, and the rousing winds of change swept all before it. All creatures under heaven were in motion, all affairs on earth in transition. Just as our fellow creatures right and left, uplifted by self-examination and restrained in sorrow, were putting the past

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behind them and mapping out new dreams of reform and regeneration, friends and relatives who used to praise us as a model family and an exemplary household now started urging us to move with the times. It seemed that new models of family life had cropped up in Guangdong, or Hong Kong it may be, or even the United States.

Grandfather took the lead in proposing that we change from a Monarchy to a Cabinet system. The members of the Cabinet would be nominated by Grandfather himself, to be approved by the Plenary Session of the Family Congress, including Elder Sister Xu, a nonvoting member, and the reins of government would be rotated among the official members of the Cabinet. Except for Elder Sister Xu, Grandfather's proposition was unanimously approved. Father was designated to take over the reins of government and entrusted with the reform and modernization of our Menu.

The fact was, Father had always had his food ready for him and his work cut out for him. Which meant that he ate what was put in front of him and did whatever part of the household duties that was assigned to him. Now saddled with the momentous task of overseeing the Menu for the whole family, he was embarrassed and overwhelmed. When challenged by such major issues as what kind of tea leaves to buy, or the choice between sliced or shredded pork, he would invariably turn to Grandfather. He would never say anything without quoting Grandfather: "The Patriarch said to buy Chrysanthemum brand mosquito incense." "The Patriarch said not to make soup tonight." "The Patriarch said not to use detergent for dishwashing. Might be poisonous, these chemicals. Hot water and baking soda, much cleaner, and thriftier too."

Trouble followed immediately. Elder Sister would ask Father whenever she had a question, and Father would ask Grandfather coming back to Elder Sister Xu with, "The Patriach said so and so." So far as Elder Sister Xu was concerned, she might as well go directly to Grandfather. But that might hurt Father's feelings, and she was also afraid to bother Grandfather. Grandfather did not want to be bothered with trifles

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and had repeatedly ordered Father: "Make your own decisions! Don't always come to me!" So Father would go back to Elder Sister Xu with: "The Patriarch has said that I am to decide. The Patriarch has said that he doesn't want to be bothered."

Soon there were murmurs from Uncle and Aunt. Murmurs against what? Nobody knew for sure. Probably impatience with Father's ineptness. Perhaps a suspicion that Father was using Grandfather's name in vain, "fabricating the edict of the Emperor," as the saying goes. Possibly also disaffection with Grandfather for not completely giving up the reins of government, or annoyance at Elder Sister Xu's nagging. And finally resentment at everybody else for okaying the Cabinet system and confirming someone like Father as member of the Cabinet.

Grandfather became aware of the murmurs and formally invested Father with authority, admonishing him at the same time to accept the delegation of power to lower levels, as was in keeping with the times. Father, cornered, promised not to invoke Grandfather's name in future dealings. Having gotten his Mandate, he went ahead and delegated power to Elder Sister Xu to decide between soup or no soup, and shredded or sliced pork.

Sister Xu would not be Empowered. How can I decide, she sniveled between tears. She was so overwhelmed by the burden of responsibility that she missed a meal. The family encouraged her: "You have worked so long in our family. Power should go with office. You just take over, we are all behind you. Go ahead, buy whatever you like, cook whatever you like, and we'll eat whatever you put before us. We have faith in you."

Elder Sister Xu smiled through her tears and thanked everyone for showering her with such honors. So, for a while, things went on as before. But soon murmurings began to be audible, as it was plain that Elder Sister Xu did not have the true Mandate. Imperceptible signs of disrespect gradually evolved into outright complaints. It began with my Son, got taken up by my First Cousin and her Husband, and soon even I and

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my Wife were infected. At first, it was just sarcastic comments: "Our menu has been lying there unchanged for four decades. Must have antique value by now." "Such single-minded adherence to convention! Such rigidity! Rejection of all change!" "Our family's lifestyle is a fine example of living in a time capsule!" "Elder Sister Xu's perspectives are so restricted! Lack of culture, of course. She's all right as a person, but hopelessly backward. To think that now, in the eighties, our living standards must adapt to *her* level!"

Elder Sister Xu had no inkling of what was simmering around her. On the contrary, she began to enjoy her new status and went ahead with her own version of Reform. In the first place, the two platefuls of pickled turnip heads for breakfast were reduced in quantity to one, only served up in two plates. The sprinkling of sesame oil over the pickles was abolished. The bean-curd paste for lunch, which used to be stir-fried with a bowl of pork cubes, was now changed to plain bean-curd paste cooked in water. The soup, which used to be served on alternate days, now only turned up once a week. And when it did appear, it had changed from egg drop soup to plain water with a dash of soy sauce, sprinkled with chopped spring onions. With the money thus saved, she went and bought royal jelly as a gift offering to Grandfather. So! She was squeezing us to curry favor with Grandfather! And we could only stand by helplessly and fume! More infuriating, according to my Son's report, was the fact that after making the plain soup, she would scoop out a bowl with the thickest sprinkling of chopped spring onions for herself, before the family was served. On another occasion, she was seen cracking melon seeds as she chopped the vegetables. She must have embezzled the family's public funds! "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely!" My Son had found his newly acquired theory fully validated.

From Father downwards, nobody intervened or put a stop to the murmurs. Taking silence as acquiescence, my Son fired the first shot, choosing the moment when Elder Sister Xu was enjoying her clandestine soup. "Enough is enough! I'm sick

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of your substandard meals. And saving the pick of the chopped spring onions for yourself! That's the limit! Starting tomorrow, I want everybody to enjoy a modern life."

Elder Sister Xu cried and made a scene, but nobody did anything to stop the rush of events. We felt that my Son should have a chance. He was young, fired with ideas and full of energy. It seemed the time was ripe for the likes of him to take over. Talent must be fostered, after all. Of course I and members of the family tried to console Elder Sister Xu. "You have cooked in our family for the last forty years, your achievements outweigh everything else. Nobody can take that away!"

My Son broke out into an orgy of rhetoric: "Our family's way of eating had persisted unchanged for forty years. The problem does not stop here. What is worse, we have been served too many carbohydrates and too little protein. Lack of protein affects our growth, reduces the generation of antibodies in the white blood cells. The result is the weakening of the constitution of the population as a whole. People in the West take in seven times more protein than we do. In terms of animal fat their intake is fourteen times greater than ours. We are not as tall, nor as strong, nor as energetic as they are, not to mention body shape. They sleep once a day, six hours at the most, yet see how they carry on nonstop from morning to night. Look at us, even with our daily nap, we are still lumps of inertia. You might say how can we compare with developed countries. All right then, let's take our own national minorities. Now let me tell you something: the food structure of us Hans cannot compare with that of the minorities—you can't say that they are economically more developed than we are, can you? Our intake of protein is far lower than those of the Mongols, the Uighurs, the Hassacks, the Koreans of the North or the Tibetans of the Southwest. Now how can you expect to survive without a change in our food structure? Take breakfast for instance—the everlasting slices of steamed bread and thin porridge with pickles on the side! Heavens! Is this the kind of breakfast fit for middle-income urban resi-

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dents of China in the eighties of the twentieth century? How shockingly primitive! Porridge and pickles—perfect symbols of the sickman of Asia. This is an insidious form of genocide! A disgrace to our ancestors! This is the root of the decline of Chinese civilization! Emblematic of the backward culture of the Yellow River! If we had eaten bread and butter instead of porridge and pickles, would we have lost the Opium War to the British in 1840? Would it have been necessary for the Empress Dowager to flee to Chengde during the invasion of the Eight Allied Armies in 1900? Would the Japanese army have dared to incite the September 18 incident in 1931? Would not their regiments have collapsed in fright if they had seen our lips smeared with butter and our chins dripping with cream? If in 1949 our leadership had outlawed all porridge and pickles and ordered the nation to shift to bread and butter and ham and sausage and eggs and yogurt and cheese and honey and jam and chocolate thrown in, wouldn't we have achieved a leading place in the world community long long ago in terms of national growth rate, science and technology, art, sports, housing, education and number of cars per capita? Getting down to basics, porridge with pickles is the root of our national disasters, the fundamental reason for the superstability of our unchanging feudal system! Down with porridge and pickles! So long as porridge and pickles are not wiped out, there is no hope for China!"

The speaker was fired and the audience moved. I was seized with threefold sentiments of surprise, joy and fear. Surprise and joy that without my realizing it, my Son had actually outgrown his slit pants and no longer asked me to wipe his bottom for him. He had enriched his mind so massively, accumulated so much new learning, raised such searching questions and seized on such a crucial issue! I felt deeply that heaven and earth should give way to my Son. It could truly be said that, nourished on porridge and pickles, he harbored visions of butter and ham. It is no exaggeration to say that he has poured forth the sweeping winds of modernization,

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enveloping everything within the four dimensions. Truly may it be said, the young are to be feared, the world is theirs.

But I was also alarmed. I feared the way he had seized on all current abuses with his wit and annihilated everything with a sentence. I feared that this kind of exaggerated rhetoric was just so much air and would end in nothing. According to my half century of experience, whenever a complex problem was neatly dissected and laid out in black and white, whenever the solution to overwhelming odds was easy and ready-made, as soon as the first ecstasy of analysis and prescription was over, the agent would be reduced to impotence. With this one and only twig to carry on the family tree, Heaven forbid that he should be so afflicted!

Just as I had anticipated, my First Cousin snorted and mumbled under her breath: "All very nice indeed! If we had had that much bread and butter, we would have achieved modernization long ago!" "What!" my Son, still on the crest of his zeal, shot back at his aunt. "Khruschev had proposed his "stewed beef and potatoes" brand of socialism in the sixties, and now you are proposing a "bread and butter" version of modernization! What a coincidence! Modernization, let me tell you, is the automatization of industry, the collectivization of agriculture, the ultra-modernization of science, the conversion of defense to multiple civil uses, the whimsicality of thought, the impenetrability of terms, the distortion of art, the limitless multiplication of controversy, the paring down of academe, the mystification of concepts and the transformation of man into a set of paranormal functions. The sea of "-ization" is boundlessly shifting, butter gives it shape. The garden of delights is inaccessible, but bread builds a bridge. Of course bread and butter will not be showered down from the skies like bombs from an imaginary enemy, don't you think I know that much? What do you take me for, an idiot? But we must raise the question, we must set up a goal. A nation without a goal is like a man without a head, never knowing its own potential . . ."

"Well said, well said," Grandfather interjected, "the two

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of you are moving in the same direction. No need to argue." And so the controversy died down.

My Son believed in action. Right away the next morning, bread and butter, eggs, milk and coffee were on the table. Grandfather and Elder Sister Xu simply could not take coffee and milk. Uncle thought of a solution: chopped spring onions fried in a wok, add pepper corn, cassia bark, fennel, ginger skin, pepper, seaweed and dried hot pepper; when the mixture is cooked, add a dash of Cantonese soy sauce, then pour into coffee and milk. It's bound to drown out the barbarian stink. I tried a mouthful, it worked; the taste of coffee and milk was not discernible anymore. I also wanted to add this potion into my own cup of coffee, but seeing my Son's glare, I sacrificed my palate for his sake and gulped down the stinking mess. Alas, these little emperors of the four-two-one syndrome—four grandparents and two parents revolving around the single child—what are they leading our country into!

In three days, the whole family was in an uproar. Sister Xu was in the hospital with acute diarrhea. The doctors suspected colon cancer. Grandmother was afflicted with nervous hardening of the liver. Grandfather was hopelessly constipated. Father and Uncle, like the filial sons that they were, tried to ease his bowel movement by breaking up the constipated mass with bamboo chopsticks stuck up his rectum, but to little effect. Our First Cousin had to be operated on, while her Husband's gums were all infected and swollen. My wife would throw up after every meal, and having got rid of her western breakfast, would sneak away to her parents' home for thin porridge and pickles, keeping it a secret from our Son, of course. A greater cause for alarm was the fact that my Son had run through our monthly budget in three days. He announced that without extra funds, he would not even be able to provide thin porridge for the rest of the month. Affairs having come to this, I had no choice but to stick my neck out and join with Father and Uncle to depose my Son and restore the family life to normal.

Father and Uncle had no option other than to look to Grand-

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father, and Grandfather had no option other than to turn to Elder Sister Xu. But Elder Sister Xu was in the hospital and had announced that even after she was released from hospital she would not cook. If anybody thought her a burden, she declared, they could send her packing. Grandfather deluged her with a thousand protestations, reasserting his own philosophy of putting personal loyalty and obligations above all else. He assured Elder Sister Xu that she was preeminent on both counts, closer than Grandfather's own kin, valued above his own flesh and blood, deserving both loyalty and obligations from the family. Grandfather vowed that Elder Sister Xu was part and parcel of the family to her last breath. That if we were down to our last piece of steamed bread, Elder Sister Xu would have a bite. That if we were down to our last glass of water, Elder Sister Xu would have three sips. That if we made a fortune, Elder Sister Xu would have her share. That if our luck went down, Elder Sister Xu would still be taken care of. That such a thing as using people first and then kicking them out was beyond contempt. Grandfather threw himself into protestations, words rolling, tears streaming. Elder Sister Xu took in every word, heart and liver warming, eyes overflowing, nose dripping. Things came to such a pass that the medical staff on duty decided that this communication was detrimental to the patient's condition, and Grandfather, still teary, had to leave.

Back home, Grandfather called a plenary meeting. At the meeting, he announced that though he was getting on in years, he did not hold rigid ideas about what to eat and such like matters, even less would he harbor vaulting ambitions toward autocratic rule. "But," he pointed out, "since you had insisted that I do something about the situation, I had no choice but to speak to Elder Sister Xu. I found her heart broken by your complaints and her stomach wrecked by my Great-Grandson's western breakfast. So I give up. Eat what you like. As for me," he added, "it is just as well that I starve to death."

At this, we looked at each other and all rushed in to assure

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Grandfather that he had done a good job: for a good fifty years now, old and young each had their place, four generations coexisting under one roof. My First Cousin declared that she would cook for Grandfather, that is to say, she herself, her Husband, Grandfather, Grandmother and Elder Sister Xu would be one Eating Unit. Father hastened to declare that he would make up a second Unit with Mother, but that he would have to exclude me and my Wife, on account of our New-Wave Son who would not fit in with their eating habits. I also declared that I was with my Wife, while Uncle and Aunt banded together. My Son was a single-member Unit. My First Cousin's Husband seemed pleased and remarked: "Might as well eat separately, more like a modern lifestyle; four generations eating together is so old-fashioned, like something out of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. And anyway, so many people eating together around one table makes such a crush, not to mention the danger of catching hepatitis." My First Cousin retorted: "But where can you find such a big family in the U.S.? Can you imagine them overcoming the generation gap and sitting together to a meal?" An expression of resignation seemed to flicker across Grandfather's face.

Barely two days passed before the arrangement to eat in separate Units was up against the wall. At around eleven, my First Cousin's Unit would take over the kitchen. Armed as she was with the authority and prestige of Grandfather, we could only stand by and look on longingly. After Grandfather came Father's turn, and after Father came Uncle. When my turn came round, it was already two o'clock in the afternoon. I had to rush to work without lunch. At supper, the cycle was repeated. Something must be done. We talked about the possibility of each Unit setting up its own stove. Coal gas tanks were out of the question. To acquire the one we now have for the whole family, we had made fourteen personal visits, hosted seven dinners, given two scrolls of painting, five cartons of cigarettes and eight bottles of wine as gift offerings, and the whole process had taken thirteen months and thirteen days. You could say that we had put as much energy in it as

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firstborn infants in sucking, or old men in shitting. Buying stoves was also an arduous process. Besides, even if you do get a stove, you need a certificate to buy coal briquettes. No certificate, no briquettes. And even if you do get hold of the certificate and buy the briquettes, there was nowhere to store them. If we decided to set up four separate stoves according to the modern consciousness, we would need to expand the kitchen by thirty square meters. Or better, to install four extra kitchens. Or even better, to set up five individual apartments. Man's appetite for consumption is like a galloping fire. The current alarm at overconsumerism in the press is just a waste of breath, the more you talk, the hotter it gets. Suddenly it occurred to me like an epiphany that all this twaddle about modern consciousness and renovating your concepts and the right to privacy was just so much hot air if you do not build more houses.

Discussion on the soft science of separate stoves got us nowhere. Meanwhile, a whole tank of coal gas was exhausted in nine days. Starting this year, the Petroleum and Gas Company had introduced the new method of issuing certificates for gas supply. We were limited to fourteen tickets per year, so every tank must last at least twenty-six days to ensure cooking and hot water for the entire family all the year round. If we ran through one tank in nine days, our whole quota of certificates would not last more than four months, and what were we to do for the other eight months of the year? This was not only destroying the order of our own lives, but subverting the national planning!

We were completely dismayed: sighs, complaints, gossip and rumor filled the air. Some said we could live on uncooked mixed dough. Some said each Unit's cooking should be limited to seventeen minutes. Some said this separation into eating Units was a clear case of the relations of production outrunning the level of development of the forces of production. Some said the more you reform the worse it gets, that we were much better off when Grandfather's word was law and Elder Sister Xu ran the show. Others cursed the U.S., saying the Americans

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were like a pack of wild animals with no family and not a shred of filial piety. We have our own excellent tradition of familial virtues, why should we learn from the Americans? Why indeed? But what were we to do? After the last episode, we were ashamed to bother Grandfather again with questions and requests, so we went up to my First Cousin's Husband.

My First Cousin's Husband was the only member of the family who had had a taste of things foreign. During the last few years, he had ordered two suits, bought three ties and had been in the U.S. for six months for "further studies," in Japan for a ten-day visit and in the Federal Republic of Germany for a tour of seven cities. Well-informed, carrying himself with an air, capable of saying "Thank you" and "Excuse me" in nine different languages, he was considered the true scholar in the family. But coming from outside the clan, he was aware of his inferior status and always behaved with discretion and modesty, thus winning our deep respect.

On this occasion we were at our wit's end, hopelessly mired in the strange circle of dilemmas. Seeing the urgency of the case and the sincerity of our supplication, he returned trust for trust and delivered the goods.

"As I see it," my First Cousin's Husband began, "the basic issue is the system. Whether we eat sliced steamed bread or not is of no account. The basic issue is not what we eat, but who makes the decision and by what process this decision is arrived at. Through the feudal patriarchal order? By seniority of age and rank? By leaving things to anarchism? By relying on whims and caprices of the moment? According to published menus? Is accepting the inevitable a form of predestination? Let me tell you, the key is Democracy. Without Democracy, you won't know the taste of what you're eating no matter how good it is. Without Democracy, nobody will make a stand for reform no matter how vile the food is. Without Democracy, one can only eat in an unenlightened way, not knowing the sweetness of sugar nor the bitterness of bitter melon. How can one tell the difference, when neither the sweetness nor the bitterness has anything to do with one's own choice! Without

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Democracy, one would be passive and dumb. The Subject would lose consciousness of the act of eating, and the Eating Subject would be alienated from its nature and reduced to a manure manufactory. On the other hand, the Eating Subject may be lost in confusion, now capricious, now indiscreet, grasping at palpable gains and seeking only short-term effects, exuding hostility to its neighbors, and ultimately turn into a stomach-flaunting headless monster. In a word, without Democracy there is no choice, and without choice the Conscious Subject is alienated from its own identity."

We listened in awe, nodding in agreement. It was as if an enlightening fluid had been injected into our brains.

Uplifted by our reception, my First Cousin's Husband continued: "The seniority system is all right for a stagnant agricultural society. One might even go so far to say that it brings order, the sort of order suited to illiterates and idiots. I suppose people born with lower IQs will accept this kind of order—dull, sluggish, moribund. But it kills competition, it stifles man's initiative, creativity and changeability. We all know that without change there would have been no mankind, we would still be apes. Moreover, the system of seniority represses the young. A man's energy is at its most vital, his mind at its most active, his aspirations at their most ardent before the age of forty. Yet in reality, at this age they are all languishing at the bottom . . ."

My Son interpolated: "How true!" A few tears trickled down his cheeks.

I signaled him to stay out of this. The fact is, ever since the fiasco of his western breakfast program, his image had been somewhat damaged. People tended to associate him with risky adventures, empty theories and even a hint of the Red Guard rebel spirit—more hindrance than help in any undertaking. The other members of the family, including my First Cousin and her Husband, did not take kindly to my Son. His endorsement would only discredit my First Cousin's Husband's proposal.

"All this is fine, but what are we to do?" I asked.

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"Make a stand for Democracy!" he cried, "Hold elections! Democratic Elections, this is the key, the acupuncture point, this is the nostril of the ox where you insert the ring, this is the central link of the chain! Everybody run for elections! Let everyone make an election speech, like bidding for a contract: how much you charge, the kind of food you will supply, the obligations of the members of the family who join your program, how much you expect to get paid. Everything must be Open, Transparent, Codified, Documented, Legalized, Programed and Systemized. Let the Ballot decide! Let the People cast their vote! Let the majority rule! The minority must give in to the majority. This principle in itself is an indication of a new concept, new spirit, new order, offsetting Rigidity on the one hand, and Anarchism on the other!"

Father thought this over very carefully, the lines of his forehead creasing even deeper as his thoughts were profound. Finally he said: "Yes, I am all for it. But there are two obstacles to overcome. One is the Patriarch, he might object. The other is Elder Sister Xu . . ."

My First Cousin's Husband answered: "No problem as far as the Patriarch is concerned. He rides with the times. And anyway, he is sick and tired of overseeing the food. The real problem is Elder Sister . . ."

Here my Son lost patience: "What is Elder Sister Xu to us, and what are we to Elder Sister Xu? She is not a member of our family, she has no right to vote, anyway."

My mother remonstrated: "My Grandson, did you say that Elder Sister Xu has no right to vote? You don't know what you are talking about. Elder Sister Xu might not share our family name, might not be one of the clan. But let me tell you, you won't get anything done unless you have her on your side. I have been in this family my whole life, I should know! What do you know?"

The camp of my First Cousin and her Husband was split over this issue. My First Cousin's Husband held that making a special case for Elder Sister Xu would be betraying the principle of Democracy. Democracy and special considerations were

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mutually incompatible. My First Cousin retorted that it was very well to talk, but what was the use of highfalutin talk if it was out of touch with reality? Belittling Elder Sister Xu was as good as belittling Tradition, belittling Tradition would cost you your footing in reality and, without a firm footing in reality, any project for reform was just daydreaming, and a daydream reform was just hot air. My First Cousin did not stand on ceremony with her Husband. She said outright: "Don't think you are somebody just because you have been over the seas and can say a few foreign words! Actually in our family, you are not worth Elder Sister Xu's little finger!"

At these words, My First Cousin's Husband paled, smiled aloofly and walked out of the room.

A few days later, Uncle tried to patch things up and find a solution. He pointed out that the so-called two obstacles were but one, that Elder Sister Xu may be a die-hard Conservative, but she always listens to Grandfather. If Grandfather gives the nod, so will she. There was no basis for the conflict between the democratic process and Elder Sister Xu's special case, even less reason to bring such an imaginary conflict to a crisis.

Uncle's words dispelled the clouds. Everything seemed so clear. All our worries were much ado about nothing. All this hassle over conflicting views and such, it was really in the eye of the beholder: now it's there, and then it's gone, now it's looming, and then it's shrinking. The real test is how to find a common ground for different opinions so as to create a relaxed, friendly and trustful atmosphere. We were all much elated and full of confidence. Even my First Cousin's Husband and my Son couldn't help smiling with relief.

We unanimously entrusted Uncle and Father with the task of winning over Elder Sister Xu. Just as Uncle had predicted, it was smooth sailing all the way. True, Elder Sister was stoutly opposed to elections. "A lot of fuss and bother over nothing!" she snorted. But she also announced that having gotten safely out of this last illness she had retreated from all worldly contention. She supported nothing, opposed nothing. "If you

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want to lunch on flies, I'll eat flies. If you want to dine on mosquitoes, I'll eat mosquitoes. Just don't ask me about anything." She didn't even care whether or not she had the right to vote. She declared that she had nothing to say on any issue and would not join in on the family discussions. For all intents and purposes, Elder Sister Xu had faded from the historical stage.

We all elected the Husband of my First Cousin to be in charge of the election. What with a general housecleaning, and wiping of windowpanes, and hanging up of calligraphy scrolls, and setting out vases of the latest design of plastic flowers, the approaching date for the election actually brought a festive atmosphere. Democracy brings change, there's no denying. The day finally arrived. My First Cousin's Husband directed the operation. He wore his overseas gray suit and black tie and requested that we each make a campaign speech on "My Program to Run the Household."

Nobody spoke. One could hear the flies buzzing. My First Cousin's Husband asked: "What! No one running? I thought you were all full of ideas!"

I said: "Cousin, why don't you begin and set an example? You see, we are not used to Democracy. Quite embarrassing, really."

His Wife, my First Cousin, butted in: "Certainly not. What has it to do with him?"

My First Cousin's Husband explained in a quiet gentlemanly manner: "I am not running for election. It was not for my personal interest that I brought up the idea of Democracy. Now if you had elected me, that would discredit the idea of Democracy! And anyway, I am applying for studies abroad. I am in touch with several institutions in North America and Australia. Once I have bought enough foreign currency on the black market, I will leave. If anyone in present company volunteers to help me out a little, I'd be grateful. I'm borrowing in *RMB* and repaying in foreign currency . . ."

We looked at each other, completely flabbergasted. It occurred to us in a flash that this Election gadget was just asking

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for trouble! Wasn't it a trap, too, this speechifying, making promises right and left? Such lack of respect for one's ancestors. So inconsiderate to one's neighbors. And anyway, how can you please everybody if you were elected to run the household? There must be a screw loose somewhere, not leaving well enough alone, but playing with Elections! It occurred to us then and there that we had eaten our porridge and pickles and bean-curd paste noodles for the last several decades without Democratic Elections, and we had done just fine. Without Democratic Elections, we had neither starved nor burst with food, we had neither gnawed at bricks nor drank dog's piss by mistake, nor had we sipped our noodles into our nostrils or up our arses. But now we have to meddle in this wretched Democracy, ending up with diarrhea on the one hand and starvation on the other! This is the Chinese for you. We are not satisfied until we have got everybody bloated with edema.

But then it occurred to us that since we had already made a commitment to Democracy, we might as well enjoy a taste of it. Since the stage was already set for Elections, we might as well have a go at it. Since we were all gathered together, especially since the Patriarch had put in an appearance, the show should go on. And anyway, why should we write off Democratic Elections without giving it a chance? Supposing it works? Supposing Democratic Elections resulted in good food, tasty and healthy, comprising all the requirements of smell, taste and color, nurturing the yin and energizing the yang, reviving the blood and instilling vital energy, strengthening the constitution while keeping the body in shape; supposing it could save grocery bills and conserve energy, meet sanitary requirements without bureaucracy, reduce smoke and muffle noise; supposing everybody could have a say without having to rack their brains, and someone were in charge but without having the last word; supposing nobody had to eat leftovers yet all waste avoided, and oysters could be had without hepatitis and fish without the tang of the sea; supposing Democratic Elections could bring these benefits, it would be foolish not to have a go at it.

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So the election took place: filling the ballot, putting it into the ballot box, supervising the opening of the box, counting the ballot. Eleven ballot forms were handed out, eleven retrieved. Thus the Election was declared valid. Of the ballot forms retrieved, four were blank, that is to say, no candidate's name was written in. One came up with "anybody will do," which was as good as void. Of the rest, there were two votes for Elder Sister Xu, three votes for Grandfather and one vote for my Son.

Grandfather had the most votes, but not the required majority. It was not half, not even one third of the votes. What was to be done? Was he elected? We had not thought of that beforehand. We sought out my First Cousin's Husband for *enlightenment*. My First Cousin's Husband said there were two kinds of "laws" in the world, one documented, the other undocumented. Strictly speaking, undocumented laws were not binding. For instance, he explained, the limit on the number of presidential terms was not written in the U.S. Constitution and was not law in the strict sense of the word. It was just a convention. The basic concept of Democracy, according to him, was majority rule. But what was a majority? Wasn't majority relative? What is a simple majority? Anything more than half? What is an absolute majority? Anything over two-thirds? It all depends on tradition and working concepts. As to our Election, he said, since it was our first try, and since we were all flesh-and-blood family members, it was up to us to decide.

Here my First Cousin barged in and announced that since Grandfather had the most votes he was elected. She assured us that this was not a case of Feudal Authoritarianism, but the workings of a Modern Democracy. She added further that there was no danger of Patriarchal Authoritarianism in our family anyway, much less that it would constitute the Main Contradiction and the Main Danger. According to her, on the contrary, we should be wary of Anarchism under the guise of so-called Anti-feudalism, and steer clear of Liberalism, Self-centeredness, Subjectivism, Overconsumerism, Epicureanism

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and the Blind Worship of Things Foreign, like the fallacy that the moon over the U.S. is rounder than it is over China and other such foreign dogmas.

Here my Son suddenly got all worked up and announced in no uncertain terms that he had not cast the vote for himself. As he said it, all eyes were turned on me, as if I had cast the vote for him, as if I were guilty of the dishonorable practice of voting for my own flesh and blood. I blushed in spite of myself. Then I asked myself, who would think so, and why should they think so? Did it occur to them that even if I had voted for my son it would not comprise any offense, because not voting for my Son, I could only have chosen between My Father, My Mother, My Wife, My First Cousin etc. And anyway, according to the currently fashionable Freudian theories, would my First Cousin necessarily be more removed from me than my own Son? After all, my Son might be suffering from the Oedipus complex and harboring plans to kill me and marry my Wife. Had they thought of that? Why should they point the accusing finger at me the minute my Son makes a move?

By now, my Son was shouting at the top of his voice. He said the fact that he had one vote meant that the voice of humanity was not completely stifled, that the torch was still alight and would one day burst into a prairie fire. He said that he had concerned himself with the Reform of the family Menu purely in a spirit of giving, out of respect for the humanist tradition and an all-encompassing Love. Coming to the word *Love*, tears as big as soybeans dropped from his eyes. He said there was order in the family but no Love, and order without Love, like marriage without Love, was immoral. He said that he could have detached himself from our familial eating system long ago and gone his own way and dined on snails and cheese and asparagus and tuna fish and shrimps and veal and Kentucky Fried Chicken and sandwiches and McDonald's hamburgers and apple pie and vanilla ice cream. He also added that he loved his Aunt, meaning my First Cousin, but that he found Aunt's views unacceptable, no matter how enticing they might sound to the ears.

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At this point Uncle put in a word. Note he did not interrupt; that would have been rude. But to put in a word denotes intimacy and wisdom and a spirit of Democracy, in a word it was conferring an honor on the speaker. Uncle began by saying that my First Cousin's wording of the Main Contradiction and the Main Danger was not in keeping with the official wording of the issue. He himself felt that it was advisable never to emphasize any one aspect of a problem as the Main Danger. According to his own lifetime experience as a practicing physician, he said, the minute you pinpointed constipation as the Main Danger, it was bound to end in universal diarrhea, leading to a sellout of all pills for diarrhea and distrust of doctors in general. On the other hand, if you pointed to diarrhea as the Main Danger, it was bound to end in universal constipation leading to hernia, with the additional problem of pent-up energies building into a Heat Syndrome and leading to fistfights. The pent-up energies are fanned by fire, and the fire must be quelled by water. Only when the five elements are balanced can one maintain good health. Thus, concluded Uncle, one must be on guard against diarrhea on the one hand, and constipation on the other. Deal with the one or the other as they come. It is best, of course, to be neither constipated nor suffering from diarrhea. As Uncle finished, I thought I heard the sound of clapping.

After the clapping, we discovered that our problem was still there. Moreover, our metabolism seemed to have been hastened by all this discussion of the five elements. Anyway, we were hungry. So we decided that as Grandfather had the most votes, he should be in charge.

Grandfather did not agree. He said that cooking was a technical issue. It has nothing to do with politics, ideology, seniority, status, power, privilege or one's place in the hierarchy. He said what we needed to elect was not the best leader but the best cook. Nothing else but skill at stewing and stir-fry were the required qualifications.

My son applauded, and everybody felt this was truly an original line of thinking, a new breakthrough. But some

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pointed out that time was short, that they were hungry. The fact was, although the search for the right person to oversee our household menu was still in the stage of discussion, yet when the hour came round we all wanted our dinner. The discussion might have results, or the discussion could end in nothing, but we all wanted our dinner. Some agreed with the decision arrived at in the discussion, and some did not, but we all wanted our dinner. With permission we wanted our dinner, without permission we wanted it just the same. And so, we each went our several ways to feed our bellies.

Setting up the cooking competition was quite complicated. The requirements were that we each had to make one batch of steamed bread, one pot of rice, two scrambled eggs, a platter of chopped pickled turnips, one bowl of thin porridge and one stewed rump. To work out this program, we had altogether spent thirty days and thirty nights in discussion. There had been tension, arguments, quarrels, tears and reconciliations. By the end, we were so exhausted that we could hardly make water or walk on our own two legs. The overall result was that we had hurt each others' feelings, but had also exchanged views, that we had exhausted ourselves but also had a lot of fun. When the question of the two scrambled eggs was brought up, we tumbled over each other with laughter as if we shared a secret joke. When the requirement for chopping pickled turnips was brought up, the whole company was downcast, as if we had suddenly aged. To make a long story short, the cooking skill competition took place and the results were released. The grading went very smoothly, nobody raised any objections. The results were thus:

First Class First Grade: Grandfather and Grandmother.

First Class Second Grade: Father, Mother, Uncle, Aunt.

Second Class First Grade: I, my Wife, my First Cousin, my First Cousin's Husband.

Third Class First Grade: my Son.

We were then concerned that my Son, only getting Third Class, might be hurt, so we decided to give him a certificate of Special Honor, the "Star of Hope" certificate. Of course it

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goes without saying that he was still Third Class in spite of being "Star of Hope." Anyway, theories and terms and methodology may vary, but order was invariable.

Time passed. People were vaguely aware that all things in heaven and earth find their own balance. So after a while, our fever of excitement over the great eating debate fizzled out, and the heat of controversy over theory and terms and methodology and experimentation gradually cooled down. We did not rack our brains over whether it was a technical problem or a cultural issue, a question of institutional structure, or something never dreamt of in our philosophy. We stopped racking our brains over the problem. It seemed that without solving these knotty questions, we still managed to feed our bellies.

Elder Sister Xu passed away peacefully. She lay down for her afternoon nap and never woke up. We all remember her, respect her and venerate her memory. My Son went to work for a joint-venture company. He has probably realized his target of bread and butter daily with mounds of animal fat. On holidays back home, he would say that he has had his fill of rich foods and now only hankers after porridge and pickles, thin soup and bean-curd noodles, adding in a shamefaced sort of way: "Concepts change easily, but the palate is stubborn."

Now, Uncle and Aunt have moved into their own apartment in a new building and do their own cooking. They have a brand new kitchen with pipe gas and an exhaust fan. They have tried stewed rump, and they have tried scrambled eggs, but they still cannot do without sliced steamed bread, thin porridge, pickled turnips, thin soup and bean-curd paste noodles. Our First Cousin's Husband finally made it abroad for "further studies," studying and working at the same time, and his wife joined him later. He writes: "Here, our favorite food is porridge and pickles. Picking up our bowl of porridge with pickles to go, we feel as if we were back in home sweet home, and for the moment we forget that we are wanderers in a strange land. It can't be helped, it seems that porridge and pickles are in our genes."

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I stay with Father and Grandfather, and we live happily ever after. We eat much more meat and chicken and fish and milk and sugar and fat than ever before, we have all put on weight. Our table is groaning under dishes of fancy food in an ever-changing round of novelties. We had stir-fried pork, and we had sea slugs, we had fried peanuts, and we had cream pastry, we had cold bean-curd skin, and we had shrimp salad. We even had abalone and scallops on one occasion. The abalone and the sea slugs came and went, the salad was eaten and forgotten. But thin porridge and pickles outlasted them all. Even after a gourmet feast of all the delicacies extracted from seas and mountains, we still have to sit down to a dessert of porridge and pickles. Only with porridge and pickles as a base can our digestive organs—esophagus, stomach, intestines, liver, spleen and gall bladder—operate normally. Without this last touch of thin porridge and pickles, stomachache and gas would immediately attack us, and who knows what else, perhaps even cancer. Thanks to porridge and pickles, we have so far been preserved from stomach or intestinal cancer. I can state that porridge and pickles make up the Headrope in the Net System of our Eating; the gourmet dishes are only subsidiaries, the Meshes of the Net. Only when the Headrope is pulled up can all the Meshes open out.

After Elder Sister Xu's death, Mother shouldered the momentous task of cooking. According to rote, Mother would ask Grandfather and Grandmother: "Soup or no soup? Pork—shredded or sliced?" The Faithful repetition of this ancient query was soothing to the heart, an expression of a moral sentiment, a dedication to the memory of Elder Sister Xu. Her spirit seemed to come alive in the observance of this seemingly empty ritual of question and answer. Grandfather finally announced that so long as there was porridge and pickles, slices of steamed bread and bean-curd paste noodles, all the rest was immaterial and would be left to Mother's discretion. He begged Mother not to challenge him with all sorts of knotty questions. Mother answered submissively and did as she was told, but always felt something missing if she didn't ask first.

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When the food was on the table, she would peer around apprehensively, carefully studying Grandfather's face for any signs of disaffection. If Grandfather coughed, she would say softly to herself, perhaps there had been a speck of sand in the rice. Perhaps the pickles had been too salty. Or too bland. She would thus murmur to herself, not daring to ask outright. Of course, even if she had asked Grandfather from the beginning, there might still have been specks of sand in the rice.

One of these days, Mother was bound to pick up her courage again and go up to Grandfather asking most submissively, conscious that she was bothering Grandfather against his injunctions: "Pork—sliced or shredded?" And Grandfather's tone as he answered would be benevolent even in firmness. Even if it was only to say, "Do not ask me," it would still be a sort of answer. And then Mother, her mind set at ease, would go back to finish her cooking.

A friend from England came for a visit, a friend of Father's from the forties. He stayed with us for a week. We went out of our way to hire a western-style chef to make steak and pastry for him, but he said: "Frankly, I am not here to eat this nondescript mess that you take to be western food. Please give me something at once traditional and unique. Please!" What could we do? We had no choice but to give him thin porridge and pickles.

"What simplicity! What elegance! How tender! How soothing! Where else but in the mysterious Orient can one meet with this kind of elixir!" I taped his rhapsody of thin porridge in his impeccable Oxford accents and played the cassette to my Son.

—translated by Zhu Hong

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Burning the Days

James Salter

Passing through darkened Virginia, lips eager and sticky from Southern Comfort, a girl and I talked intently in the vestibule. She was married, her husband was off in the army. I don't remember where the bottle came from—it was either hers or we got it from the porter. The floor was trembling beneath our feet, the threshold between the cars creaking. She was from a small town somewhere and was wearing a cotton dress. The train leaned into great, lurching curves, the metal slowly squealing like a message sent along it. We saw nothing but each other's faces. It was the spring of 1944. I was nineteen years old, on my way to primary flight training. The others were in the sleeping car behind us; most had gone to bed. Soon we were embracing fiercely. A married woman on a train at night, her body tight against mine. "Pete," she moaned, "Oh, Pete . . ."

I had told her my name was Peter Slavek—it came from a novel by Arthur Koestler. I was linking everything together, fatalism, sex, war. In my imagination I was already a pilot, handsome, freedom reeking from me, winds coiled round my legs. I had no real idea of what lay ahead, vast southwestern skies with their clouds and shafts of light, towns with railroad

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tracks running through them and Masonic temples, dejected country with little lakes and fading cabins amid the pines, Bible country, the air pure with poverty and religious broadcasts. It didn't matter, I was going.

Arthur Koestler had also written about an RAF flyer named Richard Hillary, well known at the time. Hillary had been a pilot in the Battle of Britain, grass fields and the insect-like planes bouncing across them, the sky dense with fights. He was nearly killed when the canopy on his burning plane jammed, and he could not bail out. I knew his beautiful scarred looks by heart. He had written a book about his experiences called *Falling Through Space*. The chapters often closed with a knell: from this mission Peter Pease, from this mission Rupert someone, from this mission someone else, failed to return.

Hillary, Koestler noted, was burned three times—it was only the first when his canopy would not open. They patched him up—his face would be a glossy reminder of it as long as he lived—and he returned to flying and a second crash, which was fatal. He burned to death. His wish had been that his body be cremated, and his ashes scattered in the sea, and to complete the cycle this was done. He was twenty-three when he died. I do not recall whether or not he was married but there were many love letters to a particular girl.

We have long forgotten those girls, doomed to go alone or with their parents down the lane to the village church, girls whose hopes had vanished. They were the fruit that had fallen to the ground. I longed to know these girls but also to bear the guilt for having robbed them, to have my ashes be the cause of their grief.

Of course there was Saint-Exupéry. He seduced me as well. I had read him, joylessly at first, in French, line by line and constantly looking up words. He was a favorite of the French teacher. Eventually I came to like him on my own—it was his knowledge I admired, his wholeness of mind, more than his exploits—and years later my affection for him was confirmed by a woman who told me that her youthful love affair with him was the most brilliant episode of her life.

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She had met him at a reception in New York in 1941 or 1942. She was good looking, European. She fell in love instantly, at first sight. He had been in America since a few months after the fall of France in the spring of 1940. I imagine him—these are the dark days of a long war in which he would eventually vanish, fate unknown—as somewhat drab, in a gray double-breasted suit with perhaps an overlooked stain on the lapel. Like an ex-fighter whose career had ended a decade before, he is carrying a bit of weight. Balding but with a face that is smooth and somehow youthful—the clarity of intelligence shines in it—in his buttonhole is a distinguished dot of red.

She tries to talk to him, she absolutely must, "*Monsieur . . .*," but her French is hopeless. She tries English, to no avail. Finally she says straightforwardly, "*Wollen Sie mein Telefonnummer?*"

Then she goes home and waits, until late in the evening. The sullen black phone never rings. The next day, however, he calls, and the searing love letters he subsequently wrote she kept for the rest of her life.

There was also his affair on one side of the world or the other, among the palms of California or the forests of East Africa, with Beryl Markham—two ecstatic souls, somehow unjealous of each other. Over the years Saint-Exupéry managed to progress, for me, from being a mere figure of culture to one of enviable flesh and blood.

In such footsteps I would follow.

Pine Bluff, Arkansas, on a loop of a sluggish, curving river, was where we learned to fly. The field was east of town. The flying school there was run by civilians.

We lived in barracks and were broken up into flights—four students to an instructor—alphabetically, of course, although inexplicably I was with Marlow, Milnor and Mahl. Our instructor was an ancient, perhaps in his forties, crop duster from a town in the southwest part of the state, Hope, which he described as the watermelon capital of the world. His name was Basil York. We were probably among scores of young men

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he had taught to fly and were reminded of this by a stern warning for the next student to be ready when the plane taxied in from the previous flight. We waited, watching intently for the plane's number and with no chance to question whoever had just come down about what had happened, what had they done in the air and what should we look out for?

Early flights, the instructor in the rear cockpit, the bumpy taxiing out on the grass, turning into the wind, tail swinging around, dust blowing, and then the sudden, mad sound of the engine. The ground is speeding by, the wheels skipping, and suddenly we are rising in the din to see the blue tree line beyond the field boundary and, below, the curved roofs of the hangers falling away. Now fields appeared, swimming out in all directions. The earth became limitless, the horizon, unseen before, rose to fill the world, and we were aloft in unstructured air.

Looking over the side of the airplane I could not believe it, the noise, the clatter of the engine, the battering wind, and the flat country below laid out in large rectangular patterns with dirt roads, the glint of occasional metal roofs, flat water. They talked meaninglessly about "section lines." In the air these suddenly became real.

We passed a thousand feet. I felt as unnerved as if sitting in a chair at that height. We climbed higher, to fifteen hundred or two thousand feet, the height of the stalls, the first of the demonstrated maneuvers. The nose comes up into steep blue air, higher, higher still, unforgivingly higher, something sickening is happening, the bottom of the seat feels ready to drop away, and the dry voice of the instructor is explaining as at the top the plane, almost motionless, suddenly shudders, then starts to fall. Now I am to do this, his matter-of-fact voice directing it: throttle back, pull the nose up, way up, higher, hold it here, hold it . . .

There were spins, jamming the rudder in at the top of a stall and falling, the plane turning around and around like a maple pod. There was the anguish of trying to make proper S turns across a road, the wind making one loop bigger than the other unless you steepened your bank.

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An hour has passed. All directions have melted away, the earth is too vast and confusing to be able to say where we are. Only later is it clear that the roads run on cardinal headings, north-south, east-west. The world and everything in it, the river, farmers' houses, the roads and lone cars are unaware of us, droning above. The field is nowhere in sight. Like a desert, everything visible is vaguely the same when he says, "Okay. Take us home." It must be this way, I decide, though there is nothing to confirm it. After a few minutes, without a word, he abruptly corrects the heading ninety degrees as if in disgust.

Everything you have done has been unsatisfactory, the stalls not steep enough, the S turns uneven, the nose of the plane continually wandering off in one direction or the other when you are told to hold it straight and level, anything that could speed up, slide or drift away has done so.

In the distance, magically, the field appears and with precision, occasionally explaining what he is doing, he enters the traffic pattern and expertly lands. My flying suit is black with sweat. Face glazed, disheartened, I scramble from the plane as soon as we park. One of the others is standing there to take my place.

All was tin, the corrugated hangers shining in the sun, the open-cockpit airplanes, the tin gods. We were expected to solo in a few hours, not less than four or more than ten. If you were not able to take off and land by yourself after ten hours, you could be washed out. The days were filled with classes, briefings, flights, the sound of planes, the smell of them. We were mixed in with regular air cadets, some of whom were older and had flown before. We marched with them, singing their songs, the vulgarity of which was irresistible, and continued to kick into spins at three thousand feet on every flight and mechanically chant the formula: throttle off, stick forward, opposite rudder. . . . Even after three or four flights I still did not fully understand what a chandelle was supposed to be and had only a faint conception of landing.

Like the first buds appearing, individuals began to solo.

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Word of who had done it spread immediately. Face scorched red by the sun, behind me Basil York repeated over and over the desiderata as we entered traffic, "Twenty fifty and five hundred, twenty fifty and five hundred." He was referring to engine rpm and traffic-pattern altitude. "When you're flying B-17s," he said in his high-pitched voice, "I want you to still be hearing that: twenty fifty and five hundred." We had begun to execute the landings together, nose up, throttle all the way off, both of us on the stick. I knew his recitation, "Start breaking the glide, ease back on the throttle, start rounding out, all right, that's good, hold it off now, hold it off . . ." The trouble was, I did not know exactly what it all meant.

There was the famous story I heard later, of the instructor who had a favorite trick with students having difficulty learning to land. After exhausting the usual means, above the traffic pattern somewhere he would shake the control stick rapidly from side to side, banging the student's knees to get his attention. He would then remove the pin holding the stick in place and with the student twisting his neck to see what was happening, wave it in the air and toss it over the side, pointing at the student with the gesture of, you, you've got it, and pointing down. It had always worked. One day for still another lagging student he rattled the stick fiercely, flourished it and tossed it away. The student nodded numbly, bent down, unfastened his own stick and, ignoring the instructor's shouts, threw it away also. He watched as the frightened instructor bailed out and then, renown assured, reached for the spare stick he had secretly brought along, flew back to the field and landed.

To solve the complexities of the traffic pattern I had made, for quick reference, a small card with a diagram of each of the possible patterns drawn on it. Entry was always at forty-five degrees to a downwind leg but to work it all out backwards and head straight for the proper point was confusing and nothing seemed to annoy York as much as starting to turn the wrong way. The worst was when the wind changed while you were away from the field, the pattern had shifted, and everything you had tried to remember was useless.

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A week passes thus. We fly to an auxiliary field, a large meadow five or ten minutes away. There is bare earth near the edges where planes have been continually touching down.

"Let's try some landings," he says. Nervously I go over in my mind what to do, what not. "Make three good ones, and I'll get out."

We come in for the first. "Hold that airspeed," he directs. "That's good. Now come back on the power. Start rounding out."

Somehow it works. Hardly a bump as the wheels touch. "Good." I push the throttle forward in a smooth motion, and we are off again.

The second landing is the same. I am not certain what I have done but whatever it is, I try to repeat it a third time. Almost confidently I turn onto final once more. "You're doing fine," he says. I watch the airspeed as we descend. The grass field is approaching, the decisive third landing. "Make this a full stop," he instructs. I ease back the throttle. The airspeed begins to fade. "Keep the nose down," he suddenly warns. "Nose down! Watch your airspeed!" I feel a hand on the stick. The plane is beginning to tremble. Untouched by me the throttle leaps forward but through it somehow we are falling, unsupported by the roar. With a great jolt we hit the ground, bounce, and come down again. He utters a single contemptuous word. When we have slowed, he says, "Taxi over there, to the left." I follow his instructions. We come to a stop.

"That was terrible. You rounded out twenty feet in the air. As far as I can make out, you're going to kill us both." I see him rising up. He climbs out of the cockpit and stands on the wing. "You take her up," he says.

This consent, the words of which I could not even imagine. Alone in the plane, I do what we had done each time, taxi to the end of the bare spot, turn and almost mechanically advance the throttle. I felt at that moment—I will remember always—the thrill of the unachievable. Reciting to myself, exuberant, immortal, I felt the plane leave the ground and cross the hayfields and farms making a noise like a tremendous,

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bumbling fly. I was far out, beyond the reef, nervous but unfrightened, knowing nothing, certain of all, cloth helmet, childish face, sleeve flapping wildly as I held an ecstatic arm out in the slipstream, the exaltation, the godliness, at last!

At night in the white wooden barracks not far from the flight line we talked of flying, in the clatter of the student mess, and on the battered busses swaying into town. We walked the streets in aimless groups, past lawyers' offices with names painted in gold on the windows. There were tracks through the center of Pine Bluff along which freight trains moved with provincial slowness. There was the gold-domed courthouse and the bulky Pines Hotel, even then middle-aged with a portico entrance, balconies and mysterious rooms. Of the silent residential neighborhoods with large clapboard houses or lesser ones set on the bare ground, we knew nothing. From the desolate life of the town on many Sundays we returned willingly to the field.

We flew less frequently with the instructor. It was late spring, the sky fresh and filled with fair-weather clouds—weather, which could mean so much, was already a preoccupation. Late in the day the clouds would become dense and towering, their edges ablaze with light, epic clouds, the last of the sun streaming through. One afternoon, alone, I caught sight in the tops, far above, of a B-24 moving along like a great liner. Inspired by its distance and height I turned like a dinghy to follow.

On an outlying field two rows of empty peach baskets had been placed at intervals on each side of a worn lane. A cross was marked on the ground halfway down. It was a kind of bull's-eye. If your wheels touched on that spot you got a perfect grade, which is to say zero. Ten feet from it was a ten, twenty feet a twenty, and so forth. The figures were averaged and had to be some number, I don't remember, seventy or less, to pass. Around and around we flew, a supervisor on the ground in the blowing dust marking scores on a clipboard. Landing stages, this was called.

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At noon they were talking about someone's incredible grade, one of the regular air cadets with whom we were training. His score had been six. It seemed unbelievable. He was pointed out—suddenly everyone knew who he was—the one with the dark hair. I could see him in the food line, finer than the others, it seemed, slender, at ease. He had flown before, it turned out. He already had a pilot's license and sixty hours in a Cub.

The hurdles in primary were soloing and then two check rides with an Air Force pilot given, I believe, after forty and sixty hours of flying time. Don't forget to salute before and after the flight, they said, and be sure you can explain the maintenance form. In the air there would be brief commands to do this or that maneuver and at some inconvenient moment the throttle would be pulled back with the curt announcement, "Forced landing."

The shakiest students confessed their fears and often did worse because of them, but some failures were unforseeable, even unimaginable, like that of the dark-haired angel who had scored the six. One day he disappeared. He had somehow failed his forty-hour check and was gone. It made you realize how flimsy your position was and how unforgiving the machinery behind it all. The least promising of us, though we did not know it then, those with the least élan would go to bombers and attack aircraft, and the others to fighters. That was a year off. Meanwhile, one by one they were dropping away, sometimes the leaders.

In the summer of 1945, a second lieutenant wearing wings, I walked into the officers' club at Enid, Oklahoma, with Horner, classmate and companion, having driven half the continent with gas coupons begged from truck drivers. We had occasionally shot holes in rural road signs with our new pistols. In the club the jukebox was going. They were playing poker. We were part of the Air Force. It was our turn now. It was to be our story, our broad wake, the immense battering noise of the engines just outside the cockpit window of the B-25s we

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would soon be flying, roaring past the grain elevators that were close to the field. We were a form of gentleman, the sort that strolls along the beach in summer clothes after the shipwreck, making jokes about capsized lifeboats. Our interest was in the prodigious—riotous nights mainly and the emptiness of mornings when we lounged in wrinkled uniforms recalling late hours and all we had seen and done.

Horner I see with a sheet pulled around him, hair awry, and the furious arm of a girl as she awkwardly throws a bottle at him, damn you! It is in the Gayoso or the Carlton, Memphis or perhaps Dallas. Four A.M. and a knock on the door—the bellboy arriving with the unobtainable fifth under his jacket. Whoever it was who said she didn't do things like this is caught standing there in bra and panties. "Why, hello, Miss Cole," the boy says politely.

The scene shifts readily, the artistes walk on and off, some making a single appearance, others demanding more, banging on the door in the early hours with their high heels.

Withal there were moments of something else, decency, perhaps, pure amid the disorder—the two WAVES and the one I was with, though I never saw her again, who came from a world that somehow coolly rebuked ours. Clean-limbed in blue and white, she seemed prepared to like someone I was not ready to be, and I remembered her long after and her town, Green River, Wisconsin. I didn't mention it to Horner who would have used a familiar word: heartrending. In these matters, as in others, he was dauntless.

Then abruptly, in a sudden conversion, like Pascal's, he was married. I was to have been his best man, but we were at different stations by then, and I couldn't get to Florida where the wedding took place. He retained his rakish style, and we saw one another occasionally, even after he resigned his commission a few years later to enter his father-in-law's landscaping business. *Dear Fly-boy,* he would write, sometimes with a touch of wistfulness it seemed. *I hope you had a good time in Europe*, he wrote. *I used to.*

He had a face that looked as if he might be reformed, given

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the time, and that was capable of an expression very close to earnestness. At one reunion, years later, the rumor spread that he had just been seen driving through the main gate with a couple of chorus girls. It turned out to be untrue. The days of chorus girls were past though we had once gone with two from Versailles when we were in pursuit of everything except wisdom. *Susie and I were there the other night*, he later wrote of another place, *and the violinist came up to our table and asked us where the gentleman was who had been so fond of Granada. I assumed he was speaking of you, so I told him that you had returned to the front.*

The end of the war, though not unexpected, came quickly. We were in Austin at the time and aware that something had happened—people were hurrying down the street and crowding into a doorway nearby. It was the doorway of a liquor store, and they were preparing for the greatest celebration of their lives, one which, although joining in, we observed with halfhearted enthusiasm. In one bold stroke, like currency, we were devalued and for nearly six months transferred from field to field, to bases ever more bleak and—the aircraft mechanics having been demobilized—silent.

We left for overseas that winter, destined for places with storied names that had now become backwaters—defeated nations, abandoned staging points.

I had achieved, with some assistance, a state of emotional nihilism or had tried to achieve it. This seemed proper. We were going off for three years to the other side of the world with no real idea of what it would be like other than its great distance from home. This spoke for lack of attachment, even fatalism. At the same time, however, like a man with an unwholesome secret, I was in love.

During the final spring, at one of the last hops at West Point—gold buttons, gray trousers with black stripes, young faces, couples possessing the dream—there had been a moment when the crowd of dancers parted to reveal a girl in a black dress with many slits like the eyes in a silhouette and

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a flesh-colored slip beneath, a girl with beautiful hair and a dazzling smile. She was leaning back from her partner and talking. It was an illumination. It overwhelmed me. They turned and she was visible on the opposite side of him. From the shadow of the balcony, which was the running track, no, that was not it, from the arched doorway that led to the stairs where the stags lingered on the landing, I stepped forward. I walked onto the floor without hesitation as if I had received a signal, as if on cue. A hundred couples were gliding on the wide wooden floor. Not knowing her, barely knowing her partner, I said, "May I cut in?"

Fortunately I do not remember what else I said, only the confidence with which I took her in my arms and danced. Everything I was and that I was sure she was seemed clear. This close she was even more stunning, magnificent dark brows, fine arms, a touch of coolness in her level gaze. I was elated—she was so clearly the ideal. I discovered she was a student at Pratt and came from West Newton, a town near Boston. She was not like the brittle New York girls. Deft with my questions, she was more grave, assessing. Physically she was breathtaking, flawlessly made—you can say all you like about soul—and capable of arousing the greatest desire. Poised and somewhat teasing, she was maddeningly discrete about who had invited her up for the weekend and whom she knew. But I had her name and address and in the rush of those final weeks I wrote to her.

After graduation I was able to come to New York more than once to see her. We went to nightclubs, a football game. That I was still in uniform and would stay in uniform was distracting to her. Her own ambitions lay in art. In a year or two she would be working as assistant to a prominent fashion illustrator, wearing the models' clothes and sunbathing on the terrace when he was out. I said those things to her that come from enthusiasm and utter belief. I was in her thrall. I had hardly done more than kiss her, but that winter as we prepared to board the troopship it was she I called from California to say good-bye.

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There were three other men sailing who were involved with her. I was aware of only one. I had learned his name and several days out, having waited for an opportunity, I approached him as lacking in certainty as if I were going to ask for a loan. He was at the railing by himself, a lean, romantic type with a rather elegant surname, which I will approximate as Demont—I suspected that he knew her better than I did and perhaps in ways I did not. We looked at the sea for a while. As casually as I could, I mentioned her name.

He nodded his head, showing no sign of surprise. As, occasionally glancing at me, he began to talk, I realized I did not figure in his story, either among memories or rivals. I felt like a spy, one who with impossible luck finds secret papers lying openly on a desk. He had met Toni when she was fifteen, he told me. She had been visiting a cousin in Charlestown, West Virginia, where he was from. As he spoke he seemed like a young man from good family who had fallen in love with an unknown girl who had been sailing by. "She's always had men running after her in droves," he said matter-of-factly.

"What is she like?" I asked. I had a very good idea of what she was like. I had kissed her. I had felt her against me, touched her smooth neck and waist. Peripheral as these things were, I was certain what lay at the core.

She was ambitious, beautiful, heartless, he told me. A good drinker. One night when he was at Napier Field he had called her long distance and proposed for thirty minutes, and then gone on leave to New York and stayed there for ten days, begging. He had managed to read some pages in her diary. He saw that there were others, someone named Beezy. *I love him so!* she had written. There was a telegram from him saying he was flying in from Oklahoma *(Love you like mad)* to see her. *I can hardly wait!* she wrote.

All this had crushed Demont. He had given up. She belonged to Neal now, he said—he'd had her up for June Week. Neal was on the ship, too. Instinct told me not to talk to him though later, in Manila one afternoon when no one was around, light-headed as a thief, heart ripping, I searched through his belongings to see if there were letters from her. In any case, I had decided: I was going to win her.

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It took two years. Her love was slowly given and deeply held. One way or another I was able to come back to New York several times. Down Park Avenue we fled in a kind of delirium, on our way to the theater, in a separate cab from my parents, kissing passionately. I would wait outside the fashion illustrator's apartment house, and she would come down after work, young and smiling. Everywhere the city welcomed us. We were its renewal, its lyric. Along cool parkways drenched in green I drove to see her in the country where she had borrowed for a weekend the house of some friends. It was early summer, the road filled with homeward-bound cars. Chautauqua, Campfire Road. The stations are flashing by, the hour of shadow and the last brilliant light. She is waiting on shaded porches, alone in the house. I am flying along the parkways, filled with life. Of course, it did not turn out as I foresaw. This was still in the beginning. Bare shouldered and seemingly interested in other things, the dinner, how to open the wine, she shied away from me all evening. I did not know enough to take her ear in my teeth, so to speak, to hold tightly and force her to be still.

I sent close friends when they were home from the Pacific to see her, Crawford, who was gentle and sincere, Rafalko, the great end of the 1943 and 1944 teams. I did not want her to forget me, and there was also the power of all the letters, of being apart, the denied love that reality cannot equal.

I cannot think of it without sadness. I think of the day-long, burning hours in her apartment with the same record playing over and over, phrases from it like some sort of oath I will know till the day I die. Along here somewhere I met Paula. I thought, like any man, this is paradise, two women. What was to prevent it, I would love them both. I could not, of course. One of them devoured the other, as women do, with a condescending word.

For once only are we perfectly equipped for loving. That was the time—she, perhaps, was not the right person, or I was not. It is heartbreaking to remember her pleas and her simple words: I am waiting.

There is the fever and afterwards the long white mornings,

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the blankness of recovery. I was in Washington by then, still on the road that led away from her and among rivals she did not know. She had stopped begging me to let my true desires and real self live. She had written them off although when love has been etched so deeply the scar remains always.

A few years later she married someone. He was away somewhere when I came to see her, one of the last times. My first book had been published; there was money from the sale of it to the movies, and we were going to dinner at the Brazilian restaurant next door to her old apartment where Greta Garbo, she once told me, liked to go.

She was wearing a blue silk dress. The same dark hair, birch-white skin, full mouth, bright teeth. The same goddess's body. We drank, we talked as we used to but it was not the same, it had been used up. We spent the night in harmony, like two veteran dancers, reunited but no longer lustrous.

She was married to still another man when she died at forty, beautiful and unachieved until the end. She had never had children or fame. Men had always desired her, some I never knew about. As if obedient to her wishes I had finally turned to the life she always envisioned for me, but too late for the two of us. The years when we might have joined together had passed.

It is in the blizzards of New England that I see her, the snow, the old houses hidden in it, warm window lights. Things lost have an unnatural clarity. I drive through her town in winter, oak woods, pale sky, a stone boathouse, memories. I think of her mother whom I never met, her mother's life, when she brought her children east to live, or was it that her mother stayed in California and sent them to an uncle and aunt in West Newton? No matter, there is the pond, gray and ice-coated, and the railroad bridge that she passed on walks, in her girlhood, in her youth and perfection long ago.

In the Pacific the war had ended but its vast, shabby landscape remained. Everything was rusted and makeshift. The roads were ruined, the air filled with dust. There were cities, like Naha, with only one building standing. Manila was half

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destroyed; the tops were blown off the palm trees; the licit had disappeared. Theft was an industry, deserters coming into barracks before dawn to steal what they could. There were incomplete rosters, slack discipline. Men were threatening to shoot officers who were too conscientious. On Okinawa a corporal was driving a nurse around to the black units in an unmarked ambulance. She lay on a bed in back, naked from the waist down. She charged twenty dollars.

We went finally to squadrons that still had a few languid old-timers, secure figures who were on intimate terms with the supply sergeant and knew how everything was done. The fighter pilots went to remote fields in Korea, Japan and Okinawa. With fifteen or twenty others I was sent to transports and stayed on for a while in Manila living in corrugated iron huts that the last of the wartime flyers had abandoned, leaving behind among other things amateur photographs of nude Australian girls and addresses scribbled in pencil on the back of instrument cards.

It was not long before, like the onset of a disease, the winnowing began. Word of mouth brought the news—someone had seen someone, someone had heard. . . . Men began to disappear. One by one there came the names.

Did you hear about McGranery? He spun in on Palawan in a P-51. Gassman was killed there, too. Jack Ray, always smiling, was killed on Okinawa; Woods crashed in a coral pit on take-off there and died. The planes had to be flown correctly or they were treacherous; they would stall, one wing dropping abruptly like a horse stumbling. At low speed, on a go-around, suddenly opening the throttle could make them roll onto their back, the controls unable to prevent it.

Schrader was dead, we heard. MacDonald. Like drops of pelting rain they exploded in the dust. Averill got killed in Korea, going around in a P-38. Domey was killed; Joe Macur who a year or two earlier Ruth had loved so. Cherry got killed; Jim Smart, the streamers curling from his wingtips as he went into the sea.

The accidents—they were the stark trees in the forest that

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stood alone, at the foot of which nothing thereafter grew. The wreckage of the cities would be cleared away but never the oil slick on the sea, which was all they found of Smart. For me, however, it was a siren song—the fierce metal planes with their weathered insignia, the great noise as they launched, the distant runways at Negros, Yontan, Cebu. The danger of it was a distinction, which nothing else could afford. It would not happen to you, of course, it would never happen to you, and also, as has been pointed out, you could discover death as easily by fleeing from it, be stung the quickest.

Mahl, with whom I had flown in primary, was dead in Europe, his funeral was in Paris; Joe Martin, split-S-ing from five thousand feet in a P-47; Dabney, a unique figure, killed in a crash in Italy, the local people cut the finger from his corpse to get his ring.

Who had been killed—it was that for years. I flew in many funeral formations, timed to pass over the chapel as the officers and wives, the widow among them, emerged, two flights of four tight as nails roaring past with one ship conspicuously missing. In the evening the piano is playing at the club. They are rolling dice at the bar. You are surviving, more than surviving: their days have been inscribed on yours.

In July, 1946, five of us, Farris and I among them, went on to Hawaii. I remained for more than a year flying transports. Distances were greater then. Setting off for Sydney or New Caledonia meant being gone for a week. Flying hours were what was sought, either on routine flights or special long ones when it came in large, sedentary servings. There were very few crashes. With native boys we walked at night in the knee-high surf of distant islands, the sea warm and pulling, hunting for lobsters, reaching down to grab them with gloved hands. That is what one remembers, the rain, the solitude, the dampness and of course the longing, stepping outside the ramshackle buildings late at night wondering what they were doing elsewhere, in Honolulu or home.

As the tide finally receded there came back from the farthest

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reaches the last of the men who had gone out in wartime, some of whom landed in Hawaii, which had returned to its sleepy calm.

From Shanghai, with a small V in his front teeth and a defiant jaw came a non-rated major whom I first met playing cards. His name was something like O'Mara. He was in his mid-thirties and had the jaunty style of a bootlegger, gray already streaking his wavy black hair. He became the figure one finds in European books, my tutor. The lure of him. He flicked his cards across the table with a snap and smoked a cigar in the center of his mouth, holding it with two fingers above and a thumb below. In these, as in other things, I imitated him. I was a choirboy to him, someone from a privileged neighborhood, and he set about showing me, without formal instruction, the way to act and talk.

How little one knows or cares about the background of idols. He knew military matters much better than I did, regulations and articles of war—he had been an adjutant, and his expertise in these things was irrefutable. In Shanghai he had won a huge amount of money, $25,000 they said, then worth ten times what it is now. He did not dispute the figure. He had brand new golf clubs, a camel's hair coat, and a Cadillac convertible. What I admired more than all this, however, was the impression he gave of a man who felt he was owed nothing.

We went often to town. He was going with the young wife of a navy pilot who was away in Kwajelein on extended duty. She was going to divorce him. She and O'Mara were going to have children, lots of them, she said. "Five or six," he agreed, moving his hand upward in stages to show their height. Off they would drive in the soft, tropical night. She lived in quarters somewhere, Kanehoe probably, with the unfamiliar cream-colored car parked outside until the first light of day.

Things run in cycles, and I did not know, and perhaps neither did he, that he had already gone through the best of his luck. In the nipa huts behind the officer's club he drew losing hands and would disdainfully scoop up his cards and flip them over, face down. He had a wife in Philadelphia from

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whom he was likely estranged, someone he had mistakenly married in youth, before the great days. I heard occasional vague remarks; I don't think I ever knew her name or saw a photograph. We were smoking Bankers and Brokers, skipping the club dances and meeting every evening after work, sometimes not emerging from the huts before morning, having played all night.

The joy of meeting him, of seeing him walk unconcerned down the path—he was like the owner of a racing stable, in precarious shape as it turned out, who had come up from nothing, and for a time I more or less wore his silks. Not officially, of course—I had a future. I was a lieutenant, and he a major, but my rank had weight. I was a regular. Further, I was a general's aide. Through me he touched inner circles and legitimacy. He liked to hear stories about West Point, the visit of the president of Brazil, the sabre accidentally left stuck in the ground after the parade had passed.

After I left Honolulu I saw him only once. It was in Valdosta, Georgia. He was driving through and came to dinner. I was married by then, and we were living in a small apartment above two spinsters who were our landladies and watched all comings and goings from the parlor below. I had been promoted but I had fallen I could see in his estimation, settled in domestic life with a woman who obviously did not take to him and was not stimulated by the things we were remembering. It was not that I had lost all promise but rather, he must have felt, been bridled. It was a friendly evening, but muted.

Later I heard he had gotten into trouble. Through cards he had lost his car and the beautiful golf clubs. He'd been at Kelly Field in an administrative job, feared and disliked, a martinet and, which seemed to say everything, an inconstant one, polished and immaculate one day, unshaven and inexplicably rumpled the next. So he passed from sight.

II

Late in the summer of 1951 I entered at last the realm long sought and was sent to the 75th Fighter Squadron, the

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operations officer of which, distinguished by having had his photograph, while in Korea, on the cover of *Life*, had been killed in an accident a few days before I arrived.

What the history of the squadron was I did not know and was not told. Its tradition was embodied for me by the new operations officer, a plump southerner, lying on the floor of a bar in town, too drunk to stand but still animatedly talking to and later borne from the place by his admiring pilots. It was he who gave me my first jet rides. His equipment always looked as if it had been borrowed—helmet oddly perched on his head, flying suit too small and deeply pinched by parachute harness—but he was an experienced pilot, the stick held daintily in his stubby hand. It was September. The heat had never died. Flies were trying to come indoors for the winter and a pennant race, which turned out to be the most famous ever, was going on. In a car parked out near the runway my wife waved congratulations as I taxied in alone in the trainer for the first time.

I felt I was born for it. One of the initial things I did when I went up without a chase plane in an F-86 was climb to altitude and shut the engine off. The sky was suddenly flooded with silence, the metal dead weight. Calmly, though my fingers were tingling, I went through the steps to restart it, air start it was called. Afterwards I did it again. I wanted to be confident of the procedure in case of a flameout, and following that I never thought of one with dread.

The true hierarchy was based on who was the best pilot and who flew the most. There might be an obvious leader or two or three near equals. One quickly sensed who they were. In addition there were those who had flown in combat. Their stories were listened to more attentively. There was a big, over-confident pilot in another squadron who starred in one of the first I heard. He had flown F-80s, the earliest jets, in Korea. He was coming back from a mission one day, leading his flight home, at thirty-five thousand feet on top of an overcast. He called radar for a vector, "Milkman, this is Maple Lead," Milkman answered, identified the flight on the radar screen and gave them heading and distance to their field,

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which was K-2: One hundred and seventy degrees and a hundred and thirty miles.

The flight was low on fuel, and the weather deteriorating. They would have to make an instrument approach, the leader knew. He called his element leader for a fuel check, "What state, Three?"

The fuel gage on the F-80 had a small window where the pilot set in the number of gallons aboard at take-off, and thereafter, like an odometer in reverse, they clicked off during the flight. "Fifty gallons, Lead," the element leader replied.

"No sweat."

The clouds were solid. They could see nothing. After a while the radar station gave them another steer, still one hundred and twenty degrees, ninety-five miles.

"How are you doing, Three?"

"Thirty-six gallons."

"Roger."

The ships, not far apart, could do nothing to affect one another though they shared a common fate. There was no need to speak. Silent minutes passed. The gallons fell away.

"Milkman, Maple Lead, Where do you have us now?"

"Stand by one, Maple Lead, We have you . . . steer one eight zero to home plate, sixty-six nautical miles."

"Roger, Sixty-six out. Will you inform K-2 that we're in the soup, low on fuel. We'll be declaring an emergency." Then, to the element leader, "What do you have, Three?"

"Twenty-four gallons."

That was seven or eight minutes of flying at altitude, but they had begun to let down, throttles back to idle. They had to make an approach, line up with the runway if they could find it. The heads in the cockpits were motionless, as if nothing of interest were going on, but they were facing the unalterable. The wingmen might have even less fuel than the element leader. After a while the flight leader called again, "Milkman, Maple. How far are we out?"

"We have you eighteen miles out, Maple flight."

"Roger." He looked over at his element leader, "What do you have now, Brax?"

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"I've got nine hundred ninety-eight gallons, buddy," the reply came calmly.

Not long afterwards, one by one, they ran out of fuel. The entire flight dead-sticked into K-2.

It was among the knowledgeable others that one hoped to be talked about and admired. It was not impossible – the world of squadrons is small. The years would bow to you; you would be remembered, your name like a thoroughbred's, a horse that ran and won.

I flew in the 75th, the 335th in Korea, the 22nd in Germany and, at the end, with the 119th squadron back home, years of it, cavalry years, the waiting by empty runways, the barren operations rooms, the apocalyptic sound of engines wavering and tremendous, the idleness and cynicism, the myth.

We had pilots named Homer and Ulysses, country boys unfrivolous by nature who took good care of their cars. Farm boys, for some reason, always seemed the truest men. They were even-tempered and unhurried in the way of someone who will watch a man doing something foolish and not make any comment – the joke will come at the end. They became flyers instead of going to the city though of course it was not the same thing, and they saw the world from a distance – the Grand Canal like a gray thread winding through the barely distinguishable piazzas far below, the unmistakable narrowing spire of Paris rising above the haze. Beneath them passed all the miracles of Europe, few of great interest – their wonders were more elemental, in a room, standing naked with a member like a grazing horse's, in front of a full-length mirror with a German whore. Some married waitresses.

You knew them, that is to say their ability and to an extent their character, but a great deal was hidden. After two or three years you knew little more than at the start, but still you were attached to their silence, the honesty of their thoughts. One night one of them, on a motorcycle, sped into the concrete pillar of a bridge and was in the hospital for weeks, legs broken, jaw bound together with silver wire. Nevertheless when I came

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into the room he managed to smile. He had a willing nature and the name of an ace, strange and abrupt: Uden. Broad and capable hands, fearless eyes, yet somehow it all came to nothing. Face to face for the last time at the noisy party, the blue, farm-country eyes suddenly filled with tears, "I know I've disappointed you."

"That's true."

"I just wanted you to know one thing—it won't happen the next time."

That was true also. There was no next time. A year later someone was describing an accident at Myrtle Beach, a night takeoff with full fuel load, 450-gallon drop tanks, the planes wallowing, the overcast seamlessly black. The join-up was in sky undivided between the darkness of air and water, a sky without top or bottom; in fact there was no sky, only total blackness in which, banking steeply to try and catch up with the lights of the fleeing leader, the number three man, low in the roaring nightmare, determined to do well, went into the sea. Uden.

The leader of that flight was one of the great war aces; highly visible and bulletproof, there were a number still around. Combat had never really ended for them. The sign on the desk of one read, *The mission of the Air Force is to fly and fight, and don't you ever forget it.* Blakeslee, another, an untameable fighter whose reputation was one of temper and violence, I met only once, in my final year of flying. It was at a dinner dance in Germany, and he walked into the bar of the club not in uniform with two or three significant ribbons but dressed like the owner of a 1930s nightclub in an out-of-fashion tuxedo with a stiff shirt. He stood down at the end, a little apart; I would not have known who he was had the bartender not greeted him by name.

A couple of young officers, transients like myself, approached him as he stood waiting for his order. They were F-104 pilots from England. In war it is not like other things where youth is mainly arrogance. War is terra incognita. The young are usually eager to have the curtain lifted, even slightly, by one of the greats.

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"Evening, colonel," they said.

He looked at them without expression. His power was such that he could blow away the ego of any but the most aggressive.

"Sir," one of them said, "I just wanted to ask you a question. It's something I've never been able to get an answer to. It's about German aces."

Blakeslee, who had been a colonel and then reduced in rank so he was now a lieutenant colonel, stood there. He listened without showing the least sign of interest.

"Is it true," the young captain went on, "that the Germans counted their kills by the number of engines and would get four victories for, say, shooting down a B-17?"

Perhaps Blakeslee knew the answer. Perhaps he was weighing the real intent of the question. His face was heavier than it once had been, his body thicker. The electric skies over the Reich with their decks of clouds, shouts on the radio, confusion and vertical descents, those legend skies were gone. Finally he spoke:

"I don't know," he said slowly. He was picking up three or four glasses. "I only know one thing: it's all phoney," he said.

They like to say you cannot understand unless you've been there, unless you've lived it. You could not argue with his scorn.

How well one remembers that world, the whiff of jet exhaust, oily and dark, in the morning air as you walk to where the planes are parked out in the mist.

Soon you are up near the sun where the air is burning cold, amid all that is familiar, the scratches on the canopy, the chipped black of the instrument panel, the worn red cloth of the safety streamers stuffed in a pocket down near your shoe. From the tailpipe of the leader's plane comes an occasional dash of smoke, the only sign of motion as it streaks rearwards.

Below, the earth has shed its darkness. There is the silver of countless lakes and streams. The greatest things to be seen, the ancients wrote, are sun, stars, water and clouds. Here among them, of what is one thinking? I cannot remember

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but probably of nothing, of flying itself, the imperishability of it, the brilliance. You do not think about the fish in the great, winding river, thin as string, miles below, or the frogs in the glinting ponds, nor they of you; they know little of you though once, just after takeoff, I saw the shadow of my plane skimming the dry grass like the wings of god and passing over, frozen by the noise, a hare two hundred feet below. That lone hare, I, the morning sun and all that lay beyond it were for an instant joined, like an eclipse.

In those days there was nothing in the world but us. The rarity was fine. There were other squadrons, of course. Some you knew quite well. Ships from all three squadrons in the group and also from other fields came in past the little shack on wheels by the side of the runway. Many times it is you yourself who are returning, coming back beneath the clouds, seeing the long straight runway or the hangars alongside it blurred in the rain—an incomparable happiness, the joy of coming home.

One night in early spring there were two of us—I was the wingman. No one else was flying at the time. We were landing in formation after an instrument approach. It was very dark, it had been raining, and the leader misread the threshold lights. We crossed the end of the runway high and touched down long. In exact imitation I held the nose high, as he did, to slow down, wheels skipping along the concrete like flat stones on a lake. Halfway down we lowered the noses and started to brake. Incredibly we began to go faster. The runway, invisible and black, was covered with the thinnest sheet of ice. Light rain had frozen sometime after sundown, and the tower did not know it. We might, at the last moment, have gone around—put on full power and tried to get off again—but it was too close. We were breaking desperately. I automatically stopcocked the engine—shut it off to provide greater air resistance—and a moment later he called that he was doing the same. We were standing on the brakes and then releasing, hard on and off. The end of the runway was near. The planes were slithering, skidding sideways. I knew we were going off

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and that we might collide. I had full right rudder in, trying to stay to the side.

We slid off the end of the runway together and went about two hundred feet on the broken earth before we finally stopped. Just ahead of us was the perimeter road and beyond it, lower, some railroad tracks.

When I climbed out of the cockpit I wasn't shaking. I felt almost elated. It could have been so much worse. The duty officer came driving up. He looked at the massive, dark shapes of the planes, awkwardly placed near each other, the long empty highway behind them, the embankment ahead. "Close one, eh?" he said.

This was at Fürstenfeldbruck, the most lavish of the pre-war German airfields, near Munich. We came there from our own field, Bitburg, in the north, the Rhineland, to stand alert or fire gunnery close by. Zulu alert, two ships on five minute, two on fifteen. The long well-built barracks, the red tile roofs and marble corridors. The stands of pine on the way to the pilots' dining room where you could eat breakfast in your flying suit and the waitresses knew what you preferred.

Munich was our city, its great night presence, the bars and clubs, the Isar green and pouring like a faucet through its banks, the Regina Hotel, dancing on Sunday afternoons faces damp with the heat, the Film Casino Bar, Bei Heinz. All the women, Panas's girlfriend in the low-cut dress, Van Bockel's who was a secretary and had such an exceptional figure, Cortada's who smelled like a florist's on a warm day. Munich in the snow, coming back to the field alone on the streetcar.

I flew back to Bitburg with White, one of the two men in the squadron to become famous—Aldrin was the other—on a winter day. It was late in the afternoon, everything blue as metal, the sky, the towns and forests, even the snow. With the happiness of being with someone you like, through it we went together, at thirty-five thousand, the thin froth of contrails fading behind.

White had been the first person I met when I came to the squadron, and I knew him well. In the housing area he and

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his wife lived on our stairway. He had a fair, almost milky complexion and reddish hair. An athlete, a hurdler; you see his face on many campuses, idealistic, aglow. He was an excellent pilot, acknowledged as such by those implacable judges, the ground crews. They did not revere him as they did the ruffians who might drink with them, discuss the merits of the squadron commander or sexual exploits, but they respected him and his proper, almost studious ways. God and country—these were the things he had been bred for.

In Paris, a lifetime later, in a hotel room I watched as on screens everywhere he walked dreamily in space, the first of my countrymen to do so. I was nervous and depressed. My chest ached. My hair had flecks of grey. White was turning slowly, upside down, tethered to the spacecraft by a lazy cord. I was sick with envy—he was destroying hope. Whatever I might do, it would not be as overwhelming as this. I felt a kind of terror. I wanted to be home, to see my children again before the end, and I was certain it was near the end; I was ready to burst into tears. He did this to me unknowingly, as a beautiful woman crossing the street crushes hearts beneath her heel.

White burned to ashes in the terrible accident on the launching pad at Cape Canaveral in 1967. He died with Virgil Grissom with whom I had also flown. His funeral was solemn. I attended, feeling out of place. To be killed flying had always been a possibility, but the two of them had somehow moved beyond that. They were already visible in that great photograph of our time, the one called celebrity. Still youthful and, so far as I knew, unspoiled, they were like jockeys moving to the post for an event which would mark the century, the race to the moon. The absolutely unforeseen destroyed them. Aldrin went instead.

White is buried in the same cemetery as my father, not far away. I visit both graves when I am there. White's, though amid others, seems visible from some distance off, just as he himself was if you looked intently at the ranks.

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You remember the airfields, the first sight of some, the deep familiarity of others.

Apart from those that finally appeared when you were coming in, nose high, in fog or heavy rain, the most beautiful field I ever saw was in Morocco, down towards the south. It was called Boulhaut, a long, flawless black runway built for strategic bombers and never used, the numbers at each end huge and clear—no tire had ever marked them. You could not but marvel at its extraordinary newness.

I liked fields near the sea, Westhampton Beach on Long Island, Myrtle Beach, Langley, Eglin, Alameda where we landed in the fall ferrying planes to be shipped to the fighting in Korea and went on to Vanessi's with the Navy pilots' wives. I liked Sidi Slimane for its openness and the German fields, Hahn and Wiesbaden, Fürstenfeldbruck.

There are fields I would like to forget, Polk, where one night as a rank amateur I nearly went into the trees trying clumsily to go around with my flaps down. Later, in the wooden barracks, came another lesson. Two men in flying suits, drab in appearance, paused at the open door of the room where I sat on a bed. "Are you the one flying the P-51? Where are you from?" one asked.

"Andrews," I said. I felt a kind of glamor, being connected with the silvery plane and its slim, aggressive shape, parked by itself on the ramp. It was not hard to deduce that they were lesser figures, transport pilots probably. I told them I was in the Fourth Group rather than going into the less interesting facts—I was actually a graduate student at Georgetown. They did not seem very impressed. "Ever hear of Don Garland?" I said, naming a noted pilot in the Fourth.

"Who's that?"

"One of the best pilots in the Air Force."

"Oh, yeah?"

I offered a few exaggerations I had overheard at one time or another in the Andrews Club. Garland flew the slot position on the acrobatic team, hanging there with his bare teeth, so to speak, the proof of it being the blackened rudder of his

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ship, stained by the leader's exhaust and as a mark of pride always left that way—no mechanic would dare to rub it clean. He was a wild man, Garland—I could tell them any number of stories.

"What does he look like?"

I gave a vague answer. Was he a decent guy, they wanted to know?

I had almost been in a fight one evening at Andrews, not with Garland but with another member of the team. "Not particularly," I said.

Suddenly one of them began laughing. The other glanced at him, "Shut up," he said.

"Oh, for Christ's sake," the first one said. Then to me, "This is Garland," he said, gesturing.

I was speechless.

"What the hell's your name?" they wanted to know.

I left early in the morning, before they were up.

Later, when I actually joined the Fourth, they were luckily gone by then. There were other Garlands. At Bitburg one of the wing lieutenant colonels used to sit in my office, aimless as a country lawyer, looking at the board on which there were photographs of our pilots—I was squadron operations officer then—and ask, if war broke out which of them would become aces? We sat examining the faces together. "Emigholz," I said.

"Who else?"

A pause. "Cass, probably. It's hard to say. Minish."

There was no real way of judging. It was their skill but also their personalities, their remorselessness. "Maybe Whitlow," I added. I was trying to match them to the memory of aces or near-aces in Korea. Emigholz was like Billy Dobbs, Cass was like Matson. "And Cortada," I finally said. He was from Puerto Rico, small, excitable and supremely confident. Not everyone shared his opinion of his ability—his flight commander was certain he would kill himself.

With the instinct that dogs have, you knew where in the order anyone ranked. Experience counted, and day to day performance. Pilots with few flying hours, in the early years

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of their careers, were the most dangerous. They were young, in the well-being of ignorance, like flies on a sunny table, unaware of the fate of countless others. As regards flying, they had only a limited idea of the many ways to fail, most of them deadly.

With a lanky, indecisive lieutenant named Kelly, I left Bitburg late one day bound for Marseilles. Destination weather was forecast to be scattered clouds and eight miles visibility. I had put him in the lead. It was important to give pilots the chance to make decisions, gain confidence. The ships in a flight, for whatever reason, might become separated setting every man on his own, or a leader's radio could go out and force a wingman to take over. In an instant the responsibility for everything could shift.

Over Marseilles at thirty-five thousand feet we had just under eighteen hundred pounds of fuel remaining. The field, Marignane, was not visible. It was hidden by a deck of clouds that had moved in unexpectedly from the sea. In addition, as we circled, neither Marignane nor Marseilles Control would answer our calls.

The sun had already set and the earth was dimming. Finally Kelly signaled for speed brakes and we dove towards a corner of the great lagoon that lay east of the field. We leveled out at three hundred feet. Ahead, like a dark reef, were the clouds. Squeezed as we were into a narrow layer of vanishing light and haze—the bottom of the overcast was perhaps a hundred feet above us—we missed the field. Suddenly the ground began to rise; it disappeared in the clouds just ahead, and we pulled up, breaking out on top at two thousand feet. It had grown darker. I looked at the fuel gage: a thousand pounds. Kelly seemed hesitant, and we were at the threshold of real difficulty. "I've got it," I said, "Get on my wing." I could hear something he could not, the finality of the silence in which we found ourselves, in which the sole sound was that of the Marignane radio beacon—I rechecked the call letters against my letdown book, FNM.

I turned immediately towards the beacon and examined the let-down diagram. The light was dim. The details were

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complex—I noted only the heading to the field from the beacon and the distance and time to fly. At 175 knots this was a minute and twenty-seven seconds.

When things do not go as planned and the fuel gage is slowly going down, there is a feeling of unreality, of hostile earth and sky. There comes a point when that single needle is all you think about, the focus of all concern. The thought of bailing out of two airplanes over Marseille because we could not find the field in low clouds and darkness was making me even more precise. Did I have the right frequency and beacon? I checked again. It was right. Suddenly, for the first time, the tower came on the air. I suspected they had been waiting for someone to arrive who could speak English. Talking to them, although they were hard to understand, gave some relief: the field was open; there were lights.

We passed over the beacon, turned to the reciprocal of the field heading and flew for thirty seconds. It seemed minutes. The world was thundering and pouring out. I was determined to do everything exactly, to make a perfect approach. We began a procedure turn—forty-five degrees to the left, hold for one minute, turn back in. The direction-finding needle was rigid. It began to quiver and then swung completely around as we hit the beacon.

We started to descend. The minimum altitude for the field was eight hundred feet, minimum visibility a mile and a half. At five hundred feet we were still in the clouds. Four hundred. Suddenly the ground was just beneath us. The visibility was poor, less than a mile. I glanced at the fuel gage: six hundred pounds. A minute had passed. The second hand of the clock was barely moving. A minute and five seconds. A minute ten. Then ahead, like distant stars, faint lines of them, the lights of the field. Speed brakes out, I signalled. Gear and flaps down. We landed smoothly together in the dark.

A taxi drove us into town. We talked about what had happened, what might have. It was not an incident; it was nothing; routine. One flight among innumerable. We could find no place to eat. We slept in a small hotel on a tree-lined street and left early in the morning.

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There are things which seem insignificant at the time and which turn out to be so. There are others that are like a gun in a bedside drawer, not only weighted but possibly fatal.

For Colonel Brischetto, it was not a single detail but a series of them, none of great importance and spread over months. He was the new wing commander at Bitburg who had arrived in August, filled with ambition but having very little jet time. Tom Whitehead, the old commander, diminutive and gallant, turned over to him a veteran fighter wing. It was like turning over a spirited horse to a new, inexperienced owner who would, of course, attempt to ride.

All wing and group flying officers were attached to one of the squadrons. The wing commander flew with ours, not very frequently, as it happened, and not very well though there was nothing seriously wrong. You could feel his weakness on the radio where he was like an actor fumbling for his lines, and in following instructions in the air there was often a slight, telltale delay.

We went, each year, to North Africa to gunnery camp. The weather was always good there. At Wheelus, a large airfield in Tripoli, living in tents for four or five weeks we flew every day. It was essential for all pilots to qualify during that time (though there were occasional opportunities for a few planes to go and fire elsewhere)—there were fighter wings from all over Europe scheduled into Tripoli throughout the year, nose to tail. Not so much as an extra day there could be begged.

That year we were booked for Wheelus in the very beginning of January. All preparations had been made but we did not go—the weather at Bitburg prevented it. Throughout the holidays there had been freezing rain and low ceilings; the runway was covered with heavy ice. In North Africa the sun was shining and irreplaceable days were passing. At last the rain stopped and the forecast seemed favorable. All through the final night there were airplanes taxiing slowly up and down the runway, trying to melt the ice with the heat of their exhaust.

At noon the next day the ceiling lifted sufficiently. We were ready. It was six days after our intended departure.

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An outwardly calm but impatient Colonel Brischetto was to go in the first flight. He was on the wing of an experienced pilot, a lieutenant, his favorite instructor, in fact, Cass. They were already on the runway when he called that his tailpipe temperature, a critical gage, was fluctuating wildly, and asked Cass for advice—he had already had some minor difficulties with the ship. Airplanes had their own personalities. They were not mere mechanical objects but possessed temperaments and traits. Some were good in gunnery, others hopeless. Some were always ready to fly, others rarely. Some planes, if not creaking like ships, nevertheless made strange noises. Without minds or hearts they were somehow not wholly inanimate. An airplane did not belong to one pilot, like a horse, but to all, communally. There were no secrets—pilots talked freely about the behavior of planes and in time flew most of them.

When Brischetto asked Cass whether or not he should take off with an erratic indication, he was told that such a decision was up to the pilot. Despite his great anxiety, Brischetto made a prudent choice and aborted. He taxied back to the ramp, was assigned another airplane and became part of another flight.

Now it was early afternoon. The first planes, Cass and his flight, were well on their way to Rome where they would refuel before continuing. The clouds at Bitburg were holding at six hundred feet. The bases were ragged, the top of the overcast layered and uncertain; the visibility, threatened by rain, stood at five miles. Brischetto had just forty minutes of actual weather experience in the airplane. He felt, probably correctly, that he would have more difficulty flying on the wing of another plane in these conditions than having another plane flying on his, and indicated he would like to lead the flight.

The four ships, in elements of two, the colonel leading, taxied out to the runway. The take-off interval between elements was to be five seconds, and they were to join up, if possible, beneath the clouds so that all four could penetrate together with a single leader and a single voice.

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Brischetto read his clearance back to the tower incorrectly. He was obliged to repeat it three times before permission was given to take the runway. He had a very steady pilot, Tracy, who had never flown with him previously, however, on his wing. So, after many delays, some unavoidable, they were ready to depart.

The planes lined up on the runway together. The noise of their engines swelled. With an almost dainty slowness, the first two ships began to roll. Five seconds later, the next two. I was watching with no particular interest, sitting in the cockpit in the squadron area, a flight leader, waiting to start. Very quickly the four planes disappeared into the clouds. They had not—I attached no meaning to it—come together as a flight.

The colonel, as it happened, had responded with a distracted "Roger" to the request to reduce power slightly to allow the second element to catch up just after take-off. He then gave the command to change channels, from tower to departure control. Changing radio channels meant reaching down and back. The indicator was hard to see. It was done by counting the clicks between numbers—perhaps Brischetto did this though he was never heard on departure control.

On the ground time passed slowly, slipping by in the small, hesitant movement of the second hand on the instrument panel clock. Though it is hard to imagine, it was passing at different rates, not to be calculated in ordinary seconds, for the colonel and his wingman when they went into the clouds. For Tracy on the left wing it was like the regular, slow beat of a pulse, but for the colonel, in an abstract world of utter whiteness and noise, it had begun to accelerate. He started a slight turn to the left towards the departure beacon, which became tighter, nearly vertical, his wingman at full power pulling hard to stay in position. Then, suddenly correcting, he began to roll the other way, to the right going past straight and level, steeper and banking steeper, past the point where Tracy could stay with him, becoming inverted, heading down. "Cousin Echo," Tracy called, "I've lost you."

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Rolling out, on his own instruments then, Tracy managed to stop his descent. He found himself going over five hundred miles an hour. He called his leader a number of times on both channels, tower and departure control, but there was no reply.

The last few seconds, beneath the clouds, must have been a collapse of all reality for the colonel as he burst abruptly into the recognizable world in a nearly vertical dive. Everything he knew and had known were suddenly of no avail. If, even for a moment, he thought of bailing out, it was already too late.

The first awareness to us that anything was wrong was the announcement by the tower that the field was closed to all traffic, an emergency was in progress. There was nothing more, no voices on the air, no instructions or calls. Only silence and a few dark birds flying low, near the wintry clouds.

Brischetto was forty-one years old. He had a family, children. In the housing area the telephone must have eventually rung in his apartment. "Colonel Brischetto's quarters," one of them would say.

The aircraft was completely demolished, the accident report read. Cause of death, *injuries multiple extreme*. The body, it was stated, was destroyed beyond recognition. More than that can hardly occur. It was impossible to know with certainty why it all had happened. Most likely the colonel had looked away from his instruments for several seconds, absorbed in trying to read the number on his channel selector, down by his left elbow. That had caused the first unintentional, steep turn. He had corrected that. Perhaps he could not understand why he heard no one on the radio and looked down again. Perhaps when he returned to his instruments he saw chaos beyond his power to decipher.

Subdued, we nevertheless flew to Rome that afternoon and on to Africa where we fired gunnery for weeks over the green, unoccupied sea.

North Africa had its spell. White, forgotten cities along the coast, joined by a single empty road. The missing marble

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columns from Roman days pillaged over the centuries for European palaces and estates.

On windless mornings we took off early and headed out to sea. The tow plane was already on course, at twenty thousand feet, the slender white target moving serenely some distance behind it.

The first mission of the day. The air has a full, damp quality. Long, holy streamers curve through it, marking our passes. There is a rhythm, like section hands dreamily pounding spikes. In the gunsight the target grows larger, slowly at first and then with a rush, in range for only a second or two. The bullets leave thin traces of smoke as they vanish into the cloth—each plane's have been dipped in a different color paint so they can afterwards be counted. To the south, invisible, on the one great road of the kingdom, paralleling the sea, there are arches of palms and thousands upon thousands of stiff, laundered flags to mark the route of the wedding party traveling west from Benghasi. The king had taken a second wife who was Egyptian.

That night in Tripoli, amid the rancid smell of smoke, a torchlight parade passed along the street through the crowds. I stood outside a tailor shop and watched. The owner, Salvatore Perrucio, stood beside me. "What is it, is the king coming?" I asked.

"Oh, no," Perrucio said. "He wouldn't dare."

"Why not?"

"They kill him," he said.

I laughed at the joke.

"Don't," he warned. "Never laugh. If they see you doing that, they kill you, too. Never laugh at them. Call them anything you want, but never laugh."

It was difficult to know who he was talking about, the mobs in the street, the short dark men in double-breasted suits in the Uaddan Hotel, the wraithlike figures drifting without apparent purpose along the beach, the bare-legged men working in the salt flats near our planes? We knew none of them. They were part of something impenetrable. Together with the

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buildings and statuary of an ancient colonial world, they went back at least two thousand years, to the days of Leptis Magna and Sabratha. Surviving within them all that time was a seething and unalterable code.

Perrucio made suits, bespoke, for thirty or forty dollars as I recall. When he was twelve, he told me modestly, he could make a complete suit all by himself. He'd been a prisoner of the English during the war and had made uniforms for them. The time he spent in prison camp was the happiest of his life, he said. "A lovely country. Such beautiful women—and so easy to get. Of course, I was different looking then. I wasn't like this," he clasped his wide waist with his hands. He had the full, pleasant face of a man in touch with life. Inside the shop, half-concealed by a curtain, a boy sat, two thin legs in shorts and a plum-shaped body, cutting and basting patterns, the very age Perrucio had been.

I flew south one day, a hundred or two hundred miles into the desert, the earth changing from ruggedness to orange dust. There was no life, no roads, no trace of anything. Turning, I began to descend in long, uninquisitive arcs until finally, at fifty or a hundred feet, I was heading back north.

At that height one can see only a few miles ahead. Unexpectedly, things began to appear, occasional lonely shepherds, grazing camels, a low, dark group of tents. Suddenly there were animals scattering before me, children throwing themselves to the ground, the momentary glimpse of women having hurried to tent doors. In twenty minutes I would be on the ground at Wheelus, but I would remain aloft much longer in the minds of these unknown people, crossing their lives with furious sound and as quickly gone.

Beyond them, past shale mountains and stretches of sand came the first faint tincture of civilization: telegraph wires, cultivation, roads. Further still, hard and gleaming, the sea.

It was from the other side of this sea that Perrucio had come, from the narrow, rugged peninsula that had been the center of the world. It was easy to see the long throw of his life, Italy, North Africa, the war, and finally North Africa again

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in unmarked exile, a life begun perhaps ten years earlier than mine and meant from the beginning to be more conventional and unesteemed. I envied its simplicity, the fineness of the suits he so carefully made. The days of pale English roses, probably less well-scrubbed than I imagined and coarser voiced, were far behind. He lived among less exotic specimens now, his wife, daughter, mother-in-law.

At the Bath Club, dreary and English, there were desiccated copies of *London Illustrated* spread on the tables, and a drink of scotch cost a dime. One night, when her escort had gone off for a few minutes, we invited a watery blonde, the only woman in the club, to come to the base on Saturday night. All right, she said. She wanted to bring along a friend, someone named Emma.

"Who is Emma?"

"You'll like her," she said.

I seem to recall Emma now as being older. Saturday night was always crowded and boisterous. Half-drunk and suddenly remembering the invitation, three of us went to the main gate to meet the women and guide their car to the club. "We're waiting for a couple of visitors," I told the guards.

The road leading to the base was empty. There were no headlights, only alien darkness. Minutes passed.

"What time is it?"

"Eight-thirty."

"What time did we say?"

"I forget."

After a while one of the guards turned his head. He heard someone approaching. "Might be your visitors," he said.

"Couldn't be," I said with assurance. "They're in a car," I explained as the shadowy figures of the two demoiselles materialized down the road. They were walking unsteadily in high heels. It was miles to town. Such was the allure of our pay and wrinkled khaki.

These European women, few as they were, now seem faint pencil marks on the North African page. It was more or less clear why they had come and also that they would find little

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here. The bargains that could be struck were meager. Perhaps it was exactly this, the injudiciousness, the need for luck, that made one remember them at all.

In Morocco, where we went for unblemished weather in which to fly the new airplanes, F-100s—more powerful and less forgiving—with which we were to be equipped, the air was different. Morocco had been a French colony and bordered another sea. From its coast one could reach England or even the New World. There were boulevards, apartment houses, the elegy of French names.

Fedala was to the south with wide beaches and surf breaking close to shore. It was for off-duty hours, inexplicable blue bulbs in the ceiling of the hotel and a waiter inexpertly pouring the wine. We would sit on the terrace in the evening, the faces around the table slowly becoming indistinct. In the distance the sea, which defined everything, fell endlessly upon itself. Our glory was endless, too. We were great captains all. We sat at ease. The beaves had been slaughtered; the cooks, all in white, stood ready to prepare the meal. The idle hours are passed in drinking, talking, desiring. There are weeks left in the campaign; another follows.

Later there is the Sphinx, named probably for its predecessor in Paris on Boulevard Edgar Quinet. You could see it from the air, iron gates and a gravel driveway. Inside it was tiled, a nightclub: downstairs, blue films and books; upstairs, women. The rooms on the second floor faced the sea. "As many times as you like," she said—we were speaking French, sitting at the bar. At the far end of the room a band was playing. She was from Marseilles, skin pale and shining like fruitwood. Her dress was cut low, her breasts smooth and perfectly separated. We danced like a couple, as if we had come there together. She was pressed against me. The black tile pillars slid before my eyes, the mirrors, the trio at the floorside table, two men and a chic girl with short black hair, the gold of a wedding band on her finger. They were the *haute monde*, come for titillation.

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Canadian pilots are entering. The band is playing something I would like to remember but which will fade with the rest of it. Far away it seems, unmourned, are all the other nights, the unattainable women, nurses, admiral's daughters, the colonel's wife that time unsteadily playing blackjack, "Just give me a little bitty one," she pleaded, "Don't give it to me unless it's little." It was dealt. A jack. She stared at it, looked at her hole card, stared again. Her handsome, slurred face. "All right," she announced, "twenty-one." But it was not. The dealer took the money.

The morning light of Africa is brilliant and flat. The empty street, the silence. How was it, they want to know? That one can embroider, one can tell, but there is a silly thing one cannot—she came out to the gate to say good-bye. She asked if you would write a postcard from Port Lyautey addressed simply to Dené, Sphinx, Fedala.

In Tangier the peddlers and guides were outside at all hours, some displaying letters of recommendation. In 1956 you could buy a palace—baths, servants' quarters, patios—for $12,000. Like all exotic cities, Tangier reeked of dust, of the endless cycle of living and dying. The market was teeming, hundreds of stalls, chickens with their feet tied lying docilely on the ground, mounds of tomatoes, many misshapen, goats, women nursing babies, bags of grain. It seemed merciless. In the garden of the sultan's palace legions of ants were streaming around a dead sparrow.

I wake from a nap. The city is at its most frightening, most implacable. Day is past and night is falling. Across the avenue two girls at the beach club are hanging up their bathing suits to dry. To be alone here, I think . . . to be improvident or penniless, to feel the darkness on every side.

I am not sure where the terror of North Africa comes from, from its emptiness, I suppose, from all that is unknowable. Life is cheap there, it is only a husk. Perhaps it is the cruelty, the mutilation, the followers of El Glaoui drenched with gasoline and set afire although, as someone said, it had thoughtfully not been done in front of their children and wives, the

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British sergeants found with their genitals sewn in their mouths. Perhaps it was the trade in sex, the White Horse where beneath bright lights, as calmly as if undressing backstage, a young Spanish girl, flawless as a statue, steps from her clothes. A heavier girl produces a threatening device and straps it on . . .

We crossed Gibraltar, like a pebble far below, and then brown, hard Spain. We were going home with new airplanes, the first of those that could routinely fly faster than the speed of sound. They landed at high speed, touching down at a hundred and eighty miles an hour. On the luxurious runways and in the smooth air of North Africa this was not a challenge, but our own field was much smaller. We were at 37,000 feet, and letting down I felt a nervousness I couldn't get rid of. We entered traffic, dropped gear on the downwind leg, turned onto final. Everything looked all right. Two hundred and twenty on approach, across the end of the runway, power off, waiting to touch. A faint jolt. The ground is streaming by. As we park, the group and wing commanders hand up cold beer.

In the end I missed North Africa. I missed its desolation and the brilliance of the light. We, too, were nomads there. We traveled and lived in tents; we had our time-worn code, our duties and nothing more, to fly, to sit in the shade of the canvas and eat a white bread sandwich with grimy hands, to fly again.

We were equals there, all ranks. "Hit me," the colonel says. "I can't, I'll get court-martialed," Geraghty, who is dealing, squeals. They are drunkenly comparing Rolexes. "What's wrong with yours? It has no calendar, must be experimental," Geraghty says. All these faces, so well known. All these lives, so momentarily intimate. With Minish one day, coming back from a mission, I on his wing—without a word he pulled up and did an Immelman, I as close as you can get, then another and another, then some loops and rolls, two or three away from me, all in hot silence, I had not budged a foot, the two of us together, not a word exchanged, like secret lovers in some apartment on a burning afternoon.

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We went in the fall, a squadron at a time, to the Gironde, in the southwest of France, for more gunnery. The field there, Cazaux, girlishly white, was beside a lake. A squadron from another wing, one I had for a time flown with, was already there. They were sitting outside the barracks when we arrived, like ranch hands, sucking blades of grass—it often seemed not so much a profession as a way of wasting time, waiting for something to happen, your name to come up on the scheduling board, the scramble phone to ring, the last flights to land. The faces of these others had not changed in the year or two since last seen: Vandenburg, Paul Ingram, Christman who married a countess, Vandevander, Leach. They greeted us casually. It was as if we had come to graze and they were another clan, peaceful if not friendly, now obliged to share.

The days that Faulkner said were the most exciting of his life. He said that to Sylvester, a major I knew who'd been an information officer stationed in Greenville, Mississippi, not far from Faulkner's home, during the Korean War. A librarian Sylvester knew had offered to introduce him to Faulkner as a favor. At the agreed upon time, Faulkner appeared. He was drunk. He was wearing a wrinkled planter's suit in the coat pocket of which was a bottle. Sylvester took it to be gin. They talked about flying and the days, Faulkner said, when he had been a flyer in France. He had never been that. He had told it many times, to women, to men. Perhaps he had come to believe it.

There is a feeling that Faulkner probably had—I have had it myself—that somewhere the true life is being lived, though not where you are. He may have heard the sound of it in Greenville, the rich, destructive roar not of planes such as he had known but ones far more potent. Something in him responded to that, the same thing most likely that had made him pose as an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, invent combat missions, crashes, a silver plate in this head. He was a small man. He could sit in a chair and have his feet not touch the floor. His world was small, an illiterate county seat, a backward state, though from it he fashioned something greater, far

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greater perhaps than even he knew. A writer cannot really grasp what he has written. It is not like a building or a sculpture; it cannot be seen whole. It is only a kind of smoke somehow seized and printed on a page.

One thing I like about Faulkner apart from the simplicity, on the whole, of his life, was that he wrote on the bedroom walls. That seems to me the true mark of a writer. It is like a pianist practicing in the middle of the night when the whole household is asleep or trying to sleep—the music is greater than any of their lives.

That day in Greenville, Faulkner, ten years from his death, offered to write a story about the Air Force if in exchange he might have a ride in a jet. Sylvester promptly called the base commander, a colonel, who listened to the proposal. At the end his reply was only, "Who's Faulkner?"

One Monday, just after the pilots' meeting, the phone rang. It was a clerk in combat operations. Did I know that one of my pilots had bailed out over Chaumont? Chaumont? In France? It must be a mistake—we had nobody flying yet, I said.

Then I remembered the two planes being ferried.

The preceding Friday night, in the camaraderie at the club, someone had suggested that the planes being sent to the depot at Chateauroux for overhaul, since they still had some hours remaining on them before inspection, be released to fly over the weekend. Why not, I thought? Pilots always wanted flying time. I did not check where they had gone. It was of no importance. They were heading for Chateauroux by a roundabout route.

We waited uneasily to hear something more. Finally it came. One pilot, it was reported, had bailed out on the approach. The second had landed; it was Carney. Of DeShazer, nothing further was known.

It developed that they had gone to Munich where the ground crew had signed off the planes as fully serviced but failed to check the oil. After the weekend they had left early

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for Chateauroux. At thirty-five thousand feet DeShazer had a loss of power. It was the oil-operated main fuel regulator failing. He went over to his emergency fuel system and headed for the nearest field: Chaumont.

They made a long, straight-in final to Chaumont. Carney, flying on DeShazer's wing, saw a burst of flame, brilliant and terrifying, come out of the tailpipe. The bearings had failed. The engine was devouring itself. "Get out, Bill!" he called, but DeShazer anticipated him. The canopy shot away. The seat followed, up and over, tumbling behind the airplane, DeShazer's arms fluttering wildly. All our planes were equipped with a device that opened the safety belt automatically and allowed the pilot and seat to come quickly apart—all planes, it turned out, except one. The sum of trivialities had reached a certain number—the result was the disappearance of a man.

The seat fell and fell, Carney trying to keep it in sight. Finally the seat and pilot separated. A long white writhing shape streamed out and reached full length but never completely bloomed before going into the trees. They looked for him all day. At last, in mid-afternoon, they found him. He was dead.

Unmarried, homely, balding, with widely spaced teeth like pickets, he was good-natured. Someone had asked to borrow money, and DeShazer said there was some in the bureau in his room. It was Kelley, I think, who went there and found five or six hundred dollars lying loose and uncounted among the clothes.

After it was over and the reports had been sent in, I stopped at the club for a drink on the way home. An accident occurring in another squadron seemed a consequence of some kind; in one's own squadron it was fate, heavy and humbling. The days became divided, those before and those to come. DeShazer's name would be taken from the board on which pilots were listed, the loss probably of his chief distinction. His personal effects would be packed and shipped home. The squadron commander, Norman Phillips, would compose a letter to his

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parents. In the year to come, four or five new pilots would arrive in the squadron to begin their tours, none of them having heard of DeShazer or prepared to believe in the sudden amazing flare, like the gust before a magician's act, announcing the unfathomable.

Yet he would not be forgotten. Like others he would reappear, like the fair-haired, imaginary aces Faulkner wrote poems about. DeShazer, far more unassuming, with his wide, cracked-lip smile would remain in one's life. Arms flapping, he would tumble endlessly, his parachute, long and useless, trailing behind.

Not at first, and not until you accept that you are mortal, do you begin to realize that life and death are the same thing. DeShazer had gone elsewhere. Into the stars.

Munich for the last time, glittering in the darkness, immense—the shops, the avenues, the fine cars. The wingman's ship is out to one side near a crescent moon. The Arend-Roland comet is visible, its milky tail flying southwards for thousands of miles, an inch in the sky. I lean back and gaze at it, my helmet against the padding. I will never see it again or, just this way, all that is below. Some joys exist in retrospect but not this, the serenity, the cities shining in detailed splendor. From the deeps of the sky we look down as if upon our flocks.

The farewell party a few weeks later seems like any other though it is the last; drinking, singing, the end of the tour and an occasion, which fixes everything but which is also something else, not quite animate, an episode in the life of a squadron that will go on without you, without everyone. All will be superseded, all forgotten.

Uden and Tucker have come with German girls. The father of Uden's had been a pilot, a Luftwaffe pilot, she said. He had never returned from his third raid over England. They never had any further news. She had been five or six years old when it happened, a child of the war, handsome now and composed.

For me it is particularly poignant, not her lost father but

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the evening. At the appropriate time, rising to my feet, I try to say something of what I feel, the allowable portion. I cannot simply say I've liked being in the squadron, I tell them—my life has *been* the squadron, a life, I do not explain, that I am abandoning. A few months earlier, Spry, who had graduated a few classes after me and was in group operations, had told me he was resigning. Almost at that instant—he somehow gave me the freedom, hurled the first stone—I made the decision. It was far from decisive; I had perhaps waited too long.

The Air Force—I ate and drank it, went in whatever weather on whatever day, talked its endless talk, climbed onto the wing to fuel the ship myself, fell into the wet sand of its beaches with sweaty others and was bitten by its flies, ignored wavering instruments, slept in dreary places, rendered it my heart. I had given up the life into which I had been born and taken up another and was about to leave that, too, only with far greater difficulty.

To those that night, among whom there were some that greatness would beckon, I said I would see them again. Good luck.

I was on leave at Langley and drove up to Washington to resign. It was June, my birthday, the day on which I'd been born. It seemed fitting.

All the way, in anguish, I weighed the choices. I had published a book that year, the first. I had a wife and child with another coming soon. I was thirty-two years old and had been in uniform since I was seventeen. As I walked into the Pentagon I felt I was walking to my death.

On various floors I stopped and looked at the directories, brigadiers and major generals one had never heard of, hard at work in their bureaus; Plans, where I used to drop in and talk to Beukema about fighters, would it be difficult, he wanted to know, for him to make the transition to them, he'd been trained in B-29s? He had been in my company, a class ahead of me at West Point, outstanding in studies and captain of the hockey team. Superior in every way, an exceedingly rare

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type, he had grown up at West Point in an idyllic boyhood, the son of a professor there. He had married General Bradley's daughter and was marked (though not by that), everyone agreed, for greatness. I knew the room in barracks he had lived in, the exact color of his blond hair. I could easily see him as a fighter pilot—he seemed created for it.

He was ultimately assigned to Langley and F-84s—this was a plane with a sleek appearance but underpowered and with a long take-off roll. At thirty thousand feet one day, as squadron commander designate, he told his flight leader he wanted to try something. He began a shallow dive. It continued and began to steepen, more and more. It was a characteristic of the airplane, which may have come into effect here, that when maximum speed, the red line, was exceeded there was a control reversal and pulling back on the stick made the nose go further down rather than come up.

He crashed in the water off Langley at high speed. He perished like Icarus, not from having flown too near the sun—he was the sun's angel—but from taunting the demon of speed.

I sat at a desk in Separations and typed out my letter; then, like the survivor of some wreck, I roamed, carrying it, through the corridors for more than an hour. Finally I saw a colonel I knew, Berg, coming out of a doorway. He worked in Personnel, in charge of promotion boards. Needing the confidence of someone, I told him what I was about to do. He made no effort to dissuade me. He merely nodded. He casually mentioned several other officers who had recently resigned. I found it of little comfort. Late in the afternoon, feeling almost ill, I handed in the letter.

In thick heat I drove up Connecticut Avenue to an apartment we had the use of. Alone, I began to weep—the emptiness, the long years, all the men, the places. My former wing commander from Bitburg who had come back to Washington some months earlier was in Arlington, in the suburbs. I still felt close to him, one of his own. I called him on the telephone and, in unhappiness, managed to tell him what I had done. "You idiot," he said.

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I went there for dinner. Why had I done it, he wanted to know? I had intended to tell the truth but broke off at the last moment knowing it would sound foolish to him and instead, as an apology, brought forth something from the schoolroom— I had done it, I said, because the future looked unpromising to me. As Napoleon had remarked at his coronation, if he had been born under Louis XIV, the most he could have hoped to be was a marshal, like Turenne. I cannot imagine what he thought.

Over and over during the days that followed, with nothing to do, I watched the cars going down the avenue in the morning or looked at the lighted Capitol and the city spread brilliantly around it at night. Never another city, over it for the first time, in the lead, the field you have never landed on far below, dropping down towards it, banking steeply one way, then the other, calling the tower, telling them who you are. Never another sunburned face in Tripoli looking up at you as you taxi to a stop, the expression asking, ship okay? A thumb raised, okay. And the dying whine, like a great sigh, of the engine shutting down, the needles on the gages collapsing. It is over.

I went back to Langley. A strange, bottomless reaction had set in. With Paula and Leland, in whose house we were staying, I could hardly talk and found it impossible to laugh. Paula said she admired my courage, though what I had seemed gone. We spent that evening talking about God. They were firm believers. It all seemed unimportant and beside the point.

Dreams remained. For years afterwards in nightmares stark as archive footage, I was what I had been. We were in Asia somewhere. Disaster was in the air. We were capitulating, and there had been a warning from the enemy, a written warning, that because of the many atrocities there could be no guarantee of safety. I was standing in a hospital near three or four pilots, one of whom I knew. They were going to try to cross to where their planes were parked, take off and continue fighting. They started for the field. There was firing, heavy and relentless.

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Someone came to ask if I would take the fourth plane. An F-100. I hadn't been in one for years . . .

I did fly, however. On weekends I flew with the National Guard and went with them to summer camp in Cape Cod or Virginia. In the fall of 1961 we were placed on active duty—it was the so-called Berlin Crisis—and went to France for almost a year, to Chaumont where DeShazer had crashed and where my agent, Kenneth Littauer, had flown during the first World War. They had lit bonfires at the corners of the field, he said, to guide planes home after dark.

It was September. We landed in a light rain, the first ones, having flown the planes across the Atlantic, stopping in the Azores and Seville. I asked the crew chief who met me what the town was like. He answered without hesitation, "Looks all right."

That year, I understood quite well, was the close of things. We were reserves—I had looked down upon such as we were now. I wore the uniform still, the colored ribbons, but the genuineness was gone, even when Norstad, the glamorous theater commander, came on a visit and lay sideways in an easy chair in his flying suit, chatting about the outbreak of war and what it would bring as he saw it, or even the brusque appearance of LeMay himself, with a retinue that filled an entire plane. We were able to conduct ourselves well enough if called upon and convincingly say, "Sir," but it was only for a time.

This transparency set me free. All that before had been insignificant, unmartial, caught my eye, buildings, countryside, towns, hotels. As a lieutenant colonel I had a room of my own at the head of the stairs. There, late at night, back from a restaurant, back from the bar, I sat writing. I had three lives, one during the day, one at night and the last in a drawer in my room in a small book of notes.

There were wonderful things in that book, things which I am unable to write or even imagine again. That they were wonderful was not my doing—I merely took the trouble to put them down. They were like the secret notebook of the

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chasseur at Maxim's, without ego or discretion. The great blue car I drove is gone, the house of Lazan and his wife, where we went for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner, I know is off towards Langres somewhere, but I doubt I would be able to find it again, the elegant couple in Paris have divorced, the young girl, the essential element—of course, she cannot change; that is the whole point—went to America and became what you might expect. Ironically, the portrait I made of her, she never read.

Much has faded but not the incomparable taste of France, put to my lips then so they would always remember it. I know that taste, the yellow headlights flowing along the road at night, the towns by a river, the misty mornings, the thoughts of everything that happened there, the notes that confirmed it and made it imperishable.

In the blue twilight, lightning descends to the dim Texas plains. I can hear it crackling on the radio. The sky is filled with storms, a huge line of them. I am barely on top at 42,000 feet. They boil beneath me, shot with lightning like a kind of X ray, heaving the airplane around. Down there is Frederick, Oklahoma, where we were stationed for a while just after the war. There were shining new planes in rows but no one to maintain them. The bare wooden barracks grew cold as autumn advanced.

By now it is dark. The radio compass is erratic. I believe I have Tyler but can't be sure. A bit later I try Baton Rouge—nothing. The fuel is just at fifteen hundred pounds. I call for New Orleans weather: scattered and ten miles visibility, they reply, but beneath me it is overcast despite the report. Finally, not more than five minutes out, the clouds begin to break, there are lights.

Years when I crossed the country alone, like some replica Philip Nolan, in thousand mile legs. Taking off from Wright-Patterson in a tremendous rainstorm, unable to even see the end of the runway or the trees. Taking off from McGuire in another downpour—Ritchings with an umbrella walking me

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out to the ship—taking off at Mobile, taking off at March and Forbes. Taking off at Tyndall, the earth like dust on a mirror, a long unmoving line of smoke—from the paper mill, was it?—running south as far as eye could see. Going out early in the morning, hands still numb, the magical silence of the runways, the whole pale scene. Heading for the Gulf under its blue haze, counties and parishes intent and unaware though I know their lives in vast detail, Brookley shining like a coin in the light off Mobile Bay.

Sometimes because of the light, in the visor there is the moist dark of one's own eye bigger than a movie poster. Sometimes there is the sun directly ahead making it impossible to read the instruments. The earth below is shadowed. There are mythic serpents of water, lakes, rivers smooth as marble. Empty sky, the rumbling aircraft, the radio overflowing with voices and sounds. Above the yellow horizon, near the vanishing sun, suddenly, a dot. Behind it a faint line, a contrail in shadow. By some forgotten reflex I am stunned awake, as in days past when we watched intently, when the body filled with excitement to see it: the enemy!

There were airfields everywhere, left over from the war, relic fields the names of which I knew from stories, Wendover, Pocatello. Leaving them and climbing out, over the alkali, the thin trace of roads, railroad tracks, dust. Not a city, not even a house. Snow on the distant hills that are slowly sinking as I rise, all else brown. The west. From here it is endless, land that goes on forever. Down there it is the sky that has no end.

One night as I was calling for a let-down near St. Louis, the city jewel-like and clear, a voice in the darkness asked, "Flatfoot Red? Is that you," Flatfoot, our call sign from Bitburg, and red, the color of the lead flight.

"Yes," I said. "Who's that?"

Enroute you seldom saw other fighters and almost never recognized a voice.

"Ed White."

The pleasure, the thrill in fact, the sort that comes from a

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lingering glance across a room, a knowing nod, or a pair of fingers touched briefly to the brow. We were able to exchange only a few words, how are you, where are you headed? I looked for him in the blackness, the moving star that would be his plane but the heavens were littered with stars, the earth strewn with lights. He was on his way to somewhere, the heights, I was sure. I was going in to land. "See you," he said. Who could know it would be otherwise, and he was one whom I would never see again? We had flown on the acrobatic team together. He was a superb pilot.

After his death his widow remarried. Not many years later, she herself died, possibly a suicide. The waters had closed over them both.

I often thought of White and that hail across the darkness I took as a last meeting. I thought of him as I watched a parade in the city one day. It was November but there was the heat and fullness of late summer. The dirt was blowing in the streets. I was part of New York myself by then, returned to it. They came along Fifth Avenue, the ranks of the American Legion, the police and high school bands, teenage girls shuffling in blazers, ten-year-old colonels wearing sunglasses, fat men, limpers. The drums went by. The sidewalks were crowded with people. Rows of silver trumpets passed. Then the flags. The crowd watched. Not a hat was lifted, not a hand stirred.

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Four Poems by Judith Hall

Reruns in the Oncologist's Waiting Room

Leather banquettes in old green edge the room.
A drab green of animal scales, guarded
Under agave, on days too hot to move.
Whatever breathes freezes when you turn.

Leather banquettes without that wounded sound
Of leather in summer, when you try to leave
And your skin pulls. The sound you want to make
When you want to leave and can't; won't.

Leather banquettes look darker by the window,
By the watered jade and gray-green figs;
Darker, like a mark over lips before
The kiss arrives. A man slouched on the far

Leather banquette reads his own St. Luke.
Another brings his father back from Hematology.
"Wait here." He bolts to Accounting.
The old man stands by the wall. He leans by

Leather banquettes, and days pass, one green
Solid after another; the surface almost split.
The man leans on the wall, and you wait
Your turn, wanting to remember only

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Leather banquettes. His son leads him away,
And TV, muffling all the conversations,
Keeps us watching over and over, common
In our muddled waiting, cushioned on green

Leather banquettes: A green more gray than grass
Or money, however much you have to leave.
The better doctors offer laughter piped
In waiting rooms: Lucy & Ricky & Ethel & Fred

& Danny & Kathy
Patty Cathy Lassie Batman
Amos Andy Andy Barney Opie
Bee "Leave It To Beaver"

Rimbaud's Cancer

Recollected as a consolation? Better
Than the candystriper, with paperbacks and drinks;

Drinks in soft shades, like boxing gloves. How pleasant, if
I scorn her. Scorn her young attempts at glitter blush

And scorn the M.S.W.s who ask if I need to talk.
I'd turn my face to the wall, but everyone does.

"She turned her face to the wall." *The Wings of the Dove.*
Marcel: "At daybreak, my face still turned to the wall . . ."

So turns the woman, older woman, turning in
The bed across from mine; she suffers too grandly.

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"Jesus, Jesus." She calls the nurse. "Nothing by mouth
For hours." "Jesus." Yes, deny her suffering, hers

And masses, and mine becomes more dazzling.
No, it doesn't. Change the subject.
"Dear M. Rimbaud,

In the last hospital, Isabelle insisted
You were warm; well. Her wrinkled yellow coverlet
Approximates a leg. She thinks that squirrels in

The holly compensate—at least, divert. And her
Belgian chocolates do—sweeten this banality.
You know what happens; but when it happens to me!"

"Jesus. Jesus." I climb above the suffering
Of others, like a little boy, asking, again,

For defecation tales. Look at baby's diaper:
"What a mess!" he smirks, clapping and hopping around.

What a mess the baby is, waiting to be fed.
Proving, by comparison, all that he controls.

And knows. "Look what I made alone. The biggest one!"
And trained: he trained without complaining; such control.

Is that why he had cancer? Yes, I read it too.
Now you understand the need for consolation

And my family with me. I want them here, writing
Down the last words. Someone loving would remember.

"Beautiful," Elizabeth Barrett Browning said.
Shhhh. Look: how original a final gesture.

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Stamina

The bed, the laminated stand,
With soap on it and towels, folded, four, five,
Piled like snow.

Snow on hospitals of poured concrete.
"It doesn't last." The needle in.
She came. She put the needle in.
The air went out of me, how fast—

And poison, hung in sacks, began to drip. Poison
Doesn't last.
Repeated like the objects: little soaps

And towels, damp and cup.
The nurse will watch it pass and whisper,
"One down." She threw it out
And patted me. Another hung. Her humming. Rounds.

And nothing left
To vomit. That and that. A stamina
In animals. I left my body.

Snow, flung like puffs of gauze,
Leaned foward, buckled over,
Counting to distract a mattress animal.
Remain erased.

Half-asleep, a snow will bring desire:
Eleven sacks of crocuses
And human smells excused and matted

Down. A snow will break. Six,
Seven after. Fields of celadon will fracture,
Fluid, sky.
The absences, no obstacle to calm.

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A Lullaby

How much will be postponed by isometrics
Or drinking diet lemonade in Adirondack chairs?
Or acupuncture, herbal wraps, the rose aroma-
Therapy? More waiting rooms tomorrow,

With magazines that give the latest medical advice:
"Do patients want to think it was genetic?
Or luck; or what they drank, lounging in the sun?"
Was it all because of too much sun? A baby's sunbath,

For example, and no one knew to "find the lotion!"
How many days was I lowered to the grass?
Wisteria would freckle me with shadow. Then gone,
Quick as minor surgery: A clip, a tuck.

And take away the skin, and move it over there.
How soon will the nurse arrive and comment optimistically
About the afternoon, or the body?
"I told you she'd be with you in a minute,"

Said the dear receptionist; her hands
Smelled like lilac water. Or was it violets?
Was it wrong to thank her for that one exchange
Of pleasantries, before she led me to a smaller room?

Again, I hear the other cases I resemble,
As if statistics put the facts to music:
A prognostic lullaby
Of odds, the ones that "put you in a high-risk group."

And those within the high-risk group request
A song, lulling as wisteria:
A thousand darkened yawns that turn to flowers.
Share with them a diet lemonade tonight.

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David Barber

Dürer's Rhinoceros

1515

The imagination, improvising, translated burly leather
into an overcoat of armor, converted brawn to iron.
For wrinkled folds, die-tooled metal plates
secured with welded struts. For mottled hide,
stamped medallions and, bellywise, rippling bursts
like sunspots Galileo's glass would mark a century hence.
A submarine should be riveted so impeccably.
A Swiss vault should be this stoutly tamperproof.

Chimerical and mechanical, one foot in biology
and the other in technology, Europe's debut rhino
poses on a patch of stylized turf, outsize toenails
planted squarely at the crosshatched intersection
of hearsay, surmise, awe, and steely virtuosity.
Making the most of slender evidence, the Master erred
on the side of industrial-strength intimidation:
spiked shanks, serrated hindquarters, vulcanized anatomy.

Where brute facts are lacking, exactitude takes refuge
in preternatural convictions. Here, the prevailing temper
called for ornament to shade into armament;
ascertained a galvanizing center of gravity
in a lordly girth; branded the newfangled implacable.
Here, the spirit of revelation elevated the nubby backup horn
to an exalted position, plucked from the creature's snout
and stuck between the shoulder blades, a crowning touch.

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Did he clank when he walked? Could he so much as twitch
his mistakenly furry ears under all that battlegear?
Let us not dare to read the mind of the Almighty.
The chronicles only tell us he was to be a king's gift
to the Pope, an impenetrable marvel doomed to perish
in a shipwreck en route to Rome. Lost to the deeps,
he's already a full-blown apparition in the woodcut—
a wonder reconstructed, a secondhand stab at a likeness.

Palm-frond tail, barnacled jowl, muttonchops of bony
matter—
no question, he's more than a little clownish, our poor
tinhorn monster: a bulky hyperbole, a Falstaff on all fours.
Oh, but look him up and down, and it's amply evident
allegedness has worked a certain alchemy on him.
Shackle or tether would be superfluous: his fearsomeness
has gone the way of all flesh, all this staggering regalia
houses a will-o'-the-wisp. Lapidary in its declivity,

his one eye's neither wary nor bellicose. In the shop,
he scanned sinewy fallen angels harvesting lost souls.
Inked into his element, the perspective is reversed,
and he broods, a dour nightwatchman, on the prickly heavens.
He's built to outlast edicts and categorical imperatives.
Taxonomy can't touch him now. His burden's to be wise
to the whispers that he's altogether otherworldly,
he who was immortalized as a champion of the earthbound.

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Wayne Koestenbaum

Piano Life

The Wish Department

Today I sight-read the last
Schubert sonata: he wanders between keys: evasive

and elementary, his melodies
meander. Tipsy Schubert,

if I were to return to 1974 for a piano lesson,
would my teacher say, "You've ruined your life,"

or would she just say "hello,"
and with her faraway "hello"

would possibilities cluster around my feet like clouds above
the Andes?
The last time I saw her, I lied: I unfurled

fraudulent plans for a piano future.
I wish I'd learned a Schubert sonata in college: no,

I can't cry "wolf" in the wish department,
I *do* wish I'd performed the Chopin waltzes

so I can't bluff and pretend I also wish I'd mastered Schubert—
but I wish I could imitate Schubert now:

he says what he means, says it again and again,
shifts to a distant key and disappears.

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Panavision

At my grandfather's funeral
I recited Milton's "day-labor" sonnet.
My day-labor is late and huge, I'm playing
Schumann's arduous "Carnaval."
A degree of mignon masculinity animates my fingers this morning,

Bastille Day. When Schumann wrote PAUSE
I paused, I stepped into the backyard
and watched the impatiens as if my gaze were Panavision;
I took all the bastards in, their
plenty, their bit-part fastidiousness, their sullenness—

the garden promenaded for me while Schumann paused!
I spun around and kissed the dogwood,
the mute dogwood heard me play "scènes mignonnes," the dogwood
did not bloom, Parsifal, on my holy account,
the dogwood stayed fast in its unprocreative

season while I played the "Chopin" section of "Carnaval"
(Schumann imitating Chopin!) with unwonted flurry.
Now Steve hums its plaintive melody, and says,
"Play that haunting bit again." I've haunted
my boyfriend: my métier is thunder.

Pansies

In the year 1992
Lord this is one of the magnitudes that shook me:
I played for the third time
Mozart's twentieth piano concerto in D minor.
Maybe I should have graduated to another concerto

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but Lord I don't own other concertos.
Lord I didn't make terrible errors but I coveted
one note at cost to the entire phrase;
Lord I stopped whenever I flubbed, and returned to fix
the aggrieved moment.

Long ago, at an audition, a bald, eminent judge
whispered my future
in measured words I can't remember.
Lord what did the judge whisper?
What cure for faulty playing did he propose?

At my final lesson, my teacher suggested future repertoire:
"Try Liszt's Consolation in D-flat."
Twelve summers later, my pansies lean their faces toward the sun,
and I attempt the proffered "Consolation."
Realistic pansies, where did you live, years ago, when I needed you?

Mercury's Sandal

What kind of sandal
did Mercury wear when he flew on his impossible errands

across the sky, bringing news from god to god?
I will remember this as a heavenly day even if

heaven is cut, fifty-fifty, with remorse.
Lord don't kill me before the waltzes end.

I look out the window to see parallel
patches of petunias and daisies flanking

a square of modest sod, and up
the fence a fatigued clematis climbs, its five

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flowers nearly gone. The dedicatee
of this waltz is Madame la Baronne C. d'Ivry

and when I play it, I become Madame la Baronne C. d'Ivry.
I shouldn't preen, or maybe God will take away the
drunkenness.

What do Chopin waltzes remind me of?
Movies I haven't seen,

life I am leading up to and life I am wasting,
fits of blindness and fits of sight. . . .

I used to play the opening notes as incense fumes
and now I treat them as humble arrows toward a cadence,
and beyond.

Veronica's Veil

In youth my lazy sperm couldn't reach the distant tissue
outstretched like Veronica's handkerchief

waiting for the martyred, austere splash.
When a local saint played Liszt's A-major concerto I had the
rash

effrontery to say, "With your technique, Debbie,
why not try something more musically rewarding,

like the Brahms D-minor concerto?"
We stood in the green room, and my question, about to be
ignored,

had a sick, replete thoroughness.
The sacred Saturday my mother helped me

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write a book report, she shooed my girlfriend away:
gold hair trailed up the girlfriend's thighs,

I saw it when her peasant skirt accepted
the wind's invitation to swoosh and rise.

What did my teacher mean when she said
"You have the temperament for Chopin"

or more precisely when she said
"You have the temperament for Chopin's E-minor concerto"?

Dinu Lipatti died at thirty-three, my age;
he played Chopin études, all of 'em, in public

at fifteen. Not enough mornings left until Calvary
to learn the Schumann concerto correctly

and yet I'll devote an hour this morning to its melancholy pastures
because I believe that Schumann, my first love,

this late in the millennium
still has secrets to whisper in my ear.

Hydrangeas

"Don't be a gargoyle," the great Tzerko warned me
when I played Beethoven with shoulders hunched.

Tzerko studied with Schnabel, I studied (a few lessons, tops) with Tzerko;
does that make me a descendant of Artur Schnabel?

It's not hard to be some big shot's descendant.
Through my first, dearest teacher, I'm a descendant of Dame Myra Hess.

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I sit on the "descendant of Myra Hess" throne when I try
to hide the piano's innate percussiveness.

As I write this, my dead friend Marc taps my shoulder.
Marc, I didn't see you for months before you died

but in your garden I whispered an improvised
agnostic prayer and then

spooned your ashes over sun-faded hydrangeas.
You wrote nine letters to your boyfriend, to be opened

posthumously. In the eighth, you said of me,
"He doesn't know too many secrets." Did you mean

I once knew too many secrets, but have divulged them all?
Or did you see me as a selfish, sheltered guest

who steered the subject far from your torment,
which you concealed, even when you could barely walk?

Marc, you also wrote, "Not surprisingly, more
comes out in his poems than in his conversation."

This simple thing I wish to do with my remaining life:
play the piano a little better each month, play

like a mini-master, not like Myra Hess
but like someone who studied with someone who studied with
Myra Hess.

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Cosmopolitan Greetings

Allen Ginsberg

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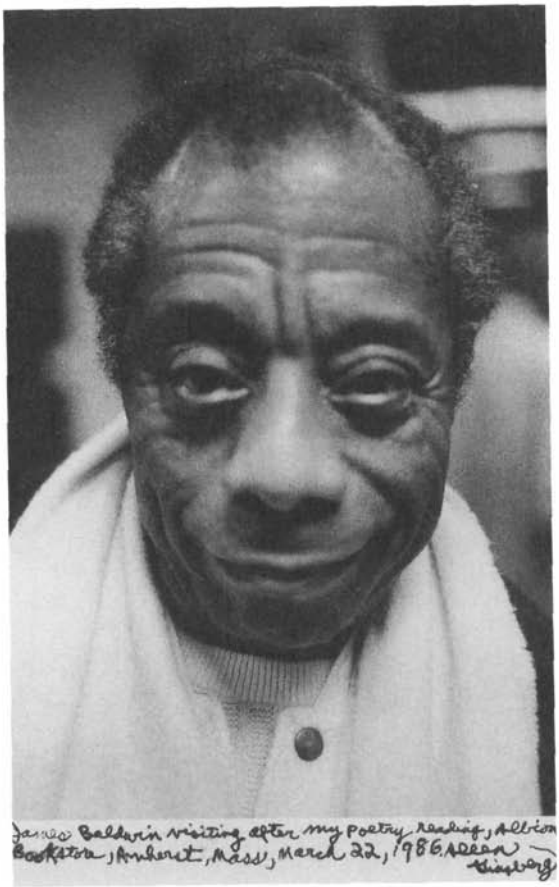

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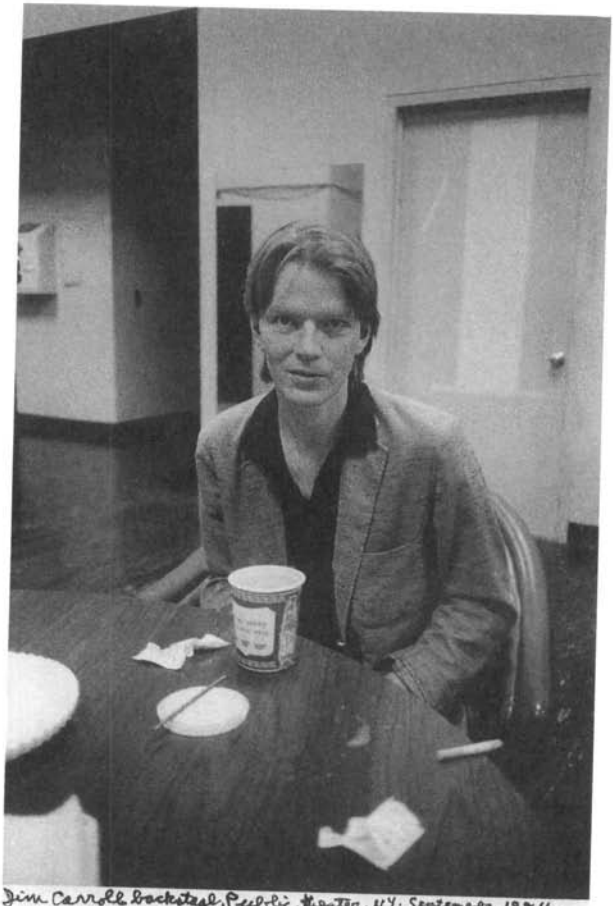

Jim Carroll backstage, Public Theater N.Y. September 1984.
Allen Ginsberg

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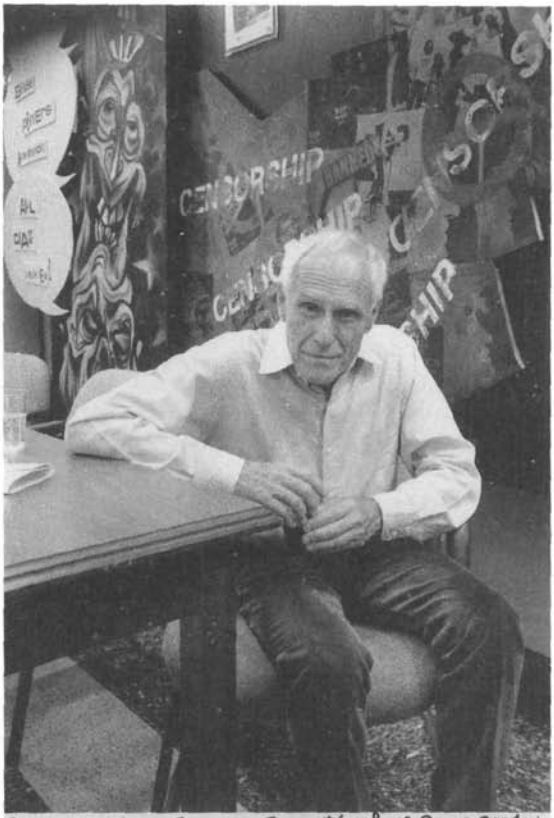

Publisher-hero Barney Rosset whose Grove Press legal battles liberated U.S. literature & film — at Tower Books' N.Y. symposium on new 90's Censorship Politics, June 20, 1991.
Aileen Ginsberg

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Andrei Voznesenski, afternoon at Christine's Polish restaurant
12th St & 1st Ave. near my apartment March 29, 1987.
Allen Ginsberg

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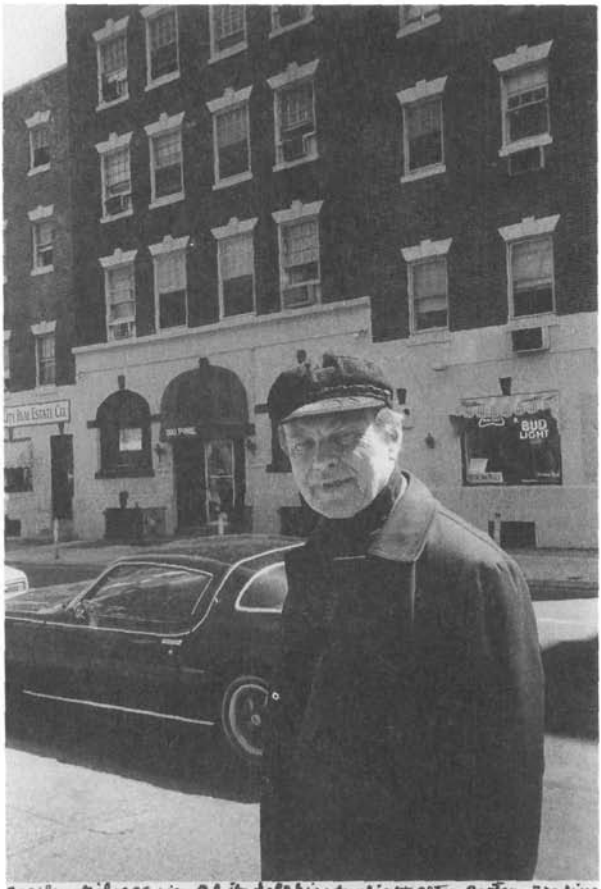

Czeslaw Milosz in Philadelphia sunlight after Poetry reading
April 28, 1984.
Allen Ginsberg ©

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Sandro Chia & William S. Burroughs at double vernissage Francesco Clemente's Paintings, Mary Boone/Leo Castelli Galleries, Soho, March 30, 1985. Chia & Clemente had read Burroughs works when they were Young Poets in the '60's in Italy. Allen Ginsberg

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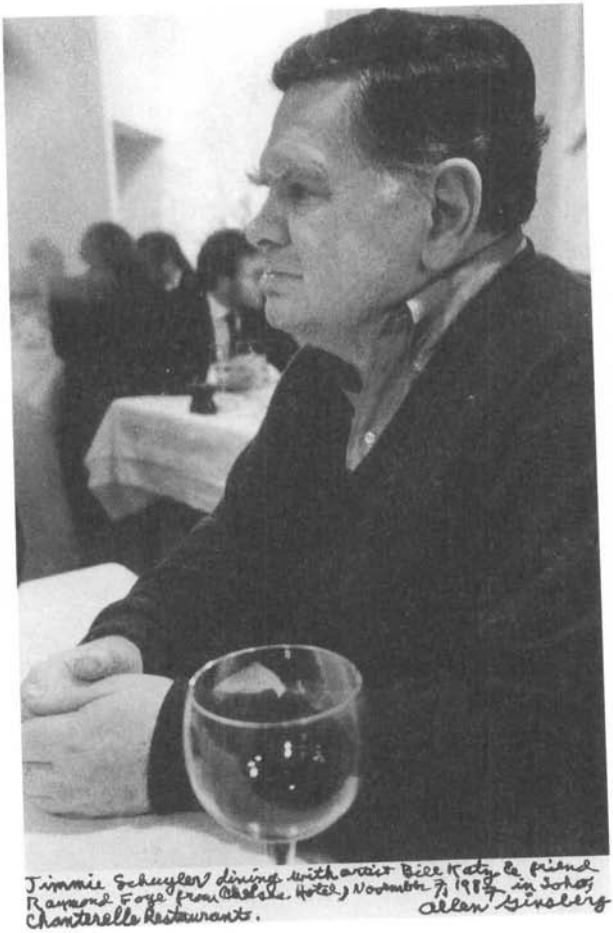

Jimmie Schuyler dining with artist Bill Katz & friend Raymond Foye from Chelsea Hotel, November 7, 1987 — in Johns Chanterelle Restaurants.

Allen Ginsberg

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Ken Kesey midnight-lunch'd at Hotel Excelsior W. 81st St. Manhattan, as I performed his Beer-Night Cantata at Lincoln Center, brief visit to N.Y., his son recently paroled in athlete tour-bus crash Northeast. December 14, 1989.
Allen Ginsberg

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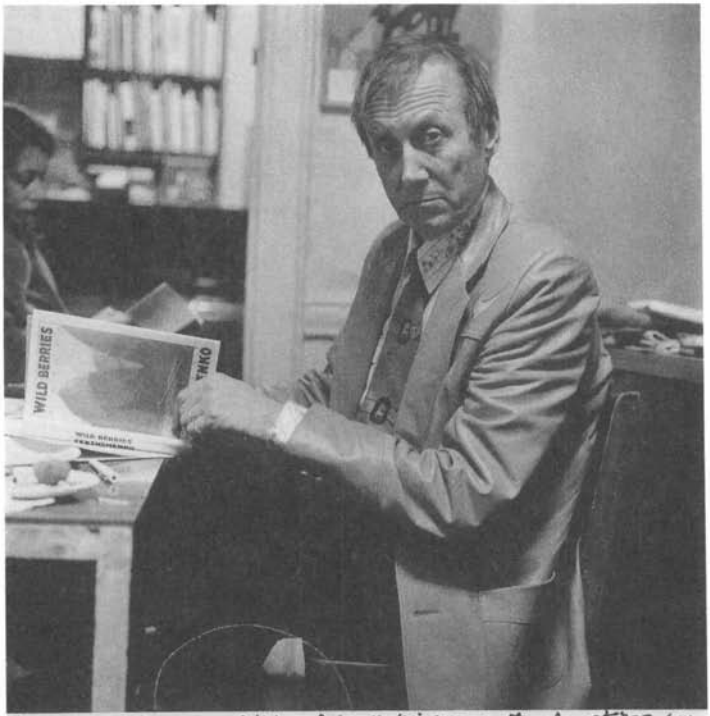

Evgeny Yevtushenko visiting, late at night, we stayed up till 3 AM talking about which Russian writers works had been suppressed till that year's present Glasnost movement, April 1986. Allen Ginsberg

This Guy, Seemingly of Mature Years

Robert Kunkle

This guy, seemingly of mature years, in conservative duds . . .

black wool pants, no pills;
reversible corduroy jacket;
cap, tucked under his arm;
clean smell, of soap and coffee

. . . he could be a cop or a property auditor, this guy she (wondering) spies, but doesn't smell, from a white-curtained upstairs bedroom window, except he's not carrying any briefcase, aluminum clipboard or spiral notepad, so he must be somebody else. Anyway, he walks, shaking his left leg between steps, up to her door, an oak door, glass rectangle in the center, and taps the brass knocker—softly, then hard, because it's a big house:

canary yellow;
colonial, double-decker;

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lots of windows with matching white curtains;
nothing unordinary, really.

The knocker, of course, is just for looks; most people use the doorbell. He remembers the bell, rings that too. Remembers because he has been here before, although not in many years, about thirteen, to be exact. Today is Wednesday, the twenty-fifth of October, in the year 1985. He pops his knuckles, first one hand, then the other. Was it mentioned that this guy is wearing shades?

mirrored lenses,
teardrop frame,
dime store quality

. . . he snatches them off (Look nice, you dummy), checks his straight dark bangs in the lenses. The door opens. Opens wide, in an easy, welcoming manner, but he doesn't seem to recognize the young woman, straight faced, in a blue maternity jumpsuit and white socks, nor she him, although it's remotely possible they went to grade school together or shared the front car of a roller coaster once. She cups her hands under her belly, feels the firm-feeling firmness there.

Second trimester, he estimates.

—Can I help you? Her eyes find his.

—Ah, hello, he says. I guess the Lanes don't live here anymore.

—The Lanes? No, they moved out just before we moved in. I mean, we bought this place from them. Five years ago.

—Five years, hmmm.

She smiles apologetically, from the corners of her mouth, stretching her lips without parting them. Her face is enchanting . . .

square jawline;
fair skin, clean pores;
fine blond mustache hair;
aquiline nose, delicately freckled

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. . . and other memorable features, which he hasn't time to catalog, noticing the door closing gently now, as if to suggest that the conversation has finished, or perhaps only to conserve heat, although the temperature outside is merely cool. Dead leaves catapult across the lawn. He says:

—I used to live here. Before the Lanes, when I was a kid. My name is Vance Vance, first and last the same. That's Vance, like *chance*, but with a V, as in Victor. He shakes his left leg.

—I see, she says, slowly, suspiciously. This guy, she thinks, about her age, perhaps a few years older, with a cap tucked under his arm, he could be lying. He continues:

—Is your phone number double eight two double eight double two?

—No.

—It must have been changed, then. Let's see, you have a cherry tree, forked at the trunk, in your backyard.

—No cherry tree. Besides, you could have looked beforehand.

—I suppose.

—Maybe you have the wrong house, she says, closing the door further. Maybe another Lane family lives up the street.

—Wait! There are, um, thirteen steps, not counting the landings, from your living room to the second floor. And you have twenty-three doorknobs, including all closet doors and the sealed door in the basement that doesn't open. Each bathroom—there are three total—has the same number of outlets: four.

—Go away, please. She shuts the door, and he hears the bolt shoot swiftly into its pocket. A miniature white curtain falls over the glass rectangle in the center of the door.

—Harrumph, he harrumphs, planting his cap on his head and turning back up the drive, shuffling, slump-shouldered. His car is parked at the curb: a '65 Duster, mint-condition body, oversized tires, the kind of macho jalopy a high-school kid might drive . . .

metallic candy-apple red exterior;
spoilers, front and rear;

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dual chrome exhaust;
chrome rims, chrome grill

. . . chrome this, chrome that: It's a hot rod. He pauses at the red door, leans down, pulls off his left boot, a low-heeled cowboy boot, turns it upside-down, emptying (with a perfunctory "aha") a pebble, and yanks the boot back on his foot.

—Vance Vance? It's the young woman, fine blond mustache hair above her lips, calling him from the porch.

—What what? he says. Old joke. He used to say that in grade school when the teacher called on him. (Are you paying attention, Vance Vance?—Yes, yes, I, I, am, am.) She smiles, confused, and asks:

—Twenty-three doorknobs counting closets?

—And the sealed door in the basement.

—What about the folding louvered doors for the den?

—Those aren't really knobs; they don't turn.

She nods agreeably: I guess you can come in, then.

He walks back to the door, the oak door with brass knocker, shaking his right leg now between steps, avoiding cracks in the concrete driveway as he goes. Before entering the house, he plucks off his cap and tucks it under his arm. She leads him into the living room, furnished with all the accoutrements, the odors and textures, of pleasantly wealthy people . . .

baby grand piano, no dust;
two oriental rugs (deep reds and violets);
glass coffee table with glossy magazines;
potpourri jars (whiff of cinnamon and oranges)

. . . breakable, stainable, crackable, drop-able things. There are many places to sit. He feints for the silk-cushioned love seat, interprets the tightening of her mouth to be disapproval and opts finally for the more humble and probably more comfortable couch. She falls gracefully into an overstuffed armchair; she's not that pregnant yet, just a bit round around the middle.

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—So, he begins. Ah . . . ?

—Elaina. Elaina Mashermore.

—Yes, thank you: Elaina. You really have changed things.

—That we have, she says. Does it still feel like home to you?

—Well, I only lived here for a few years. (Taking off his jacket.)

—Oh.

—My family moved away in seventy-two, after the incident . . . His voice flutters off. Eyes stare through her suddenly.

—I'm sorry, she says. I mean, for whatever happened.

—Yeah. He gets up, leaving cap and reversible corduroy jacket on the couch. Coughs: Mind if I look around?

—Well, you, uh—She pushes her body out of the armchair and follows him into the kitchen, thinking: Sure, make yourself at home, why don't you? He is leaning quietly against the prep island, a square butcher block with compartments on one side for all sizes and kinds of knives . . .

peeling, paring,
carving, coring,
slicing, dicing,
chopping and scoring,
plus four long skewers and a sharpening rod

. . . perhaps engaging memories of his childhood, while his right leg shakes, independently it seems, like a detachable prosthetic, from toe of cowboy boot to hip joint. He slips out a carbon-steel chopping knife, blue bladed, razor sharp, and weighs it thoughtfully in his right hand, asking:

—Would you like to see me juggle?

—With knives?

—Sure. (Pitching the chopping knife in crisp quarter turns from one hand to the other.)

—No, that's quite all right.

He drops the knife back into its slot. She exhales audibly.

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—I was quite popular as a kid, he says, circling the prep island.

—You seem like the type. She pictures him: thirteen years old, bandages on his fingers, juggling pocketknives during recess to the general amazement of his friends. I hope I have a girl, she thinks, holding her tummy.

He notices.

—This is your first, he declares, as if it were obvious, as if he were describing the color of her jumpsuit or the size of her white-socked foot.

—Are you a clairvoyant as well as a juggler?

—It's a boy.

—Stop! Just stop it! Her arms are pushing the air between them. She spreads her hands against further interruptions while she says what she has to say: Look, you may have lived in my house a long time ago, uh, Vance Vance, but I don't know anything about you. You could be a pleasant, responsible guy or, for all I know, a wacko. I mean, you're a nice guy, I'm sure. It's just that my husband will be arriving home any minute now, and this would be the perfect time for you to leave.

—Usually gets home at three o'clock, does he? (Checking his watch.)

—Yes.

—Then we have a whole hour. It's only two.

—Clever. Very clever, she says, not smiling in the slightest. He neither acknowledges nor contests her rebuke, but strolls casually from the kitchen to the dining room, inventorying to himself as he goes:

table for two with chairs for four,
cereal crumbs on one of the place mats,
rotary wall phone (no emergency numbers posted),
folding louvered doors with knobs that don't turn.

These he opens, and with a glance backward to check that she is following, he enters the den: brindled shag carpeting,

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matching leather furniture and a large-screen television, no buttons. Sunlight streams through a glass bubble in the ceiling. He stands under it, nodding approval.

—Neat-o. Your husband must be a doctor? Lawyer?

—Both. Specializes in medical malpractice. Look, Mr. Vance, I just remembered that I have an appointment with my—

He whistles: Wow, smart dude.

—my hair-um . . . you mean my husband? Sure, he's smart. Finished both degrees in six years. (She beams.)

—Six years? he says, dropping his jaw, the look on his face incredulous as heck, shocked even. He clicks his tongue, searching for the appropriate words: That sure is a long time to go to school. Six years, wow.

—And what exactly is your profession, Mr. Vance?

—Please, call me Vance.

—I'd rather not.

He continues: I'm a clown.

—A clown? She laughs, quite possibly in derision, pretentiously perhaps, definitely not with amusement.

—It's more difficult than you think, he says coolly. You have to have lots of natural talent. Clowns are born, not schooled.

She takes a step backward, chuckling amiably, smiling from the corners of her mouth again. In the time it takes for him to blink, she bolts out the den, pirouettes 180 degrees on the lavender no-wax dining-room floor, slams the folding louvered doors together and spins the latch home. (Funny, he didn't notice that lock.) His right leg shakes thoughtfully, while, without moving from the warm circle of sunlight, he listens to grunting and the squeal of something heavy sliding across the floor and stopping against the doors.

—Mr. Vance? she huffs from the other room. Don't do anything silly, please. I just need to make a little phone call. So you sit tight now. She takes several Lamaze-deep breaths.

—Guess I'll watch some TV, he says . . . if you don't mind. (Moving to the console, running his hands over the smooth surface:)

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expansive, charcoal-gray screen;
framed by two black speaker boxes;
everything housed in a roller-mounted oak cabinet;
no buttons.

He explores the edges with his fingers, scratches his head: How do you turn this on, Elaina?

—There's a remote in the top drawer of the end table next to the sofa. (Lifting the receiver off its hook.)

He finds the end table, tries the drawer. It's locked, he says.

—What? Mid-dial now, her index finger hovering above the next number (nine).

—The drawer's locked.

—Oh, sorry. Key is in the stained-glass vanity box—

—This one on the table?

—Yes, but please—

—It's locked too. He rattles the key inside.

—Be careful! she yelps. That's fragile.

—How do I open it?

She sets the receiver back on its hook, tucks the phone book under her arm and (grimacing) mounts the dining room table pushed against the folding doors, to peer through one of the louvered cracks. He is opening hardcover books from the library shelves, rifling through the pages, then dropping them into a pile on the leather sofa.

—Ahem, I see you're a fast reader, Mr. Vance.

He looks up: Oh, hello. Actually, I was looking for a key to that box. You know, the old hollow book trick?

—Yes, we don't have one of those. The key you want is on a magnet stuck behind the picture frame of that print over there, the abstract one.

He whistles: Cool; I'd have never guessed.

—Look behind the lower left-hand corner, she directs.

—Got it. He smiles, takes the key to the stained-glass vanity box, pops the latch, opens the box, picks out the second key (pocketing the first in his trousers), unlocks the top drawer of the end table and produces the remote, a long wand pimpled with fifty-five identically sized buttons. He pokes randomly; the tube flashes on. A sitcom rerun.

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—Careful, please.

—Volume's low, he mumbles, pressing buttons thoughtfully.

—Bob will throw a fit if you reset anything.

(Waving confidently:) Just going to raise the volume a bit, that's all. This one here should . . . oops.

She squints through the crack, unable to view the television screen: What happened? she demands.

—Must have hit the vertical. Let's see: nope, nope, nope—

—Stop! she cries. You'll mess everything all up, you fool!

He cringes at that, a little embarrassed, perhaps, finally. After finding the on/off button again, he kills the television picture and stuffs the remote into the vanity box, closing the lid gently.

—Sorry, she says. Sometimes I get a little spastic, you know . . .

—No offense taken. I don't really like TV, anyway.

—Perhaps you're ready to leave?

He approaches the folding doors, peers at different angles through the louvered cracks, to find where she is spying on him. Each slant presents a new sliver of her features:

mole in the center of her neck,
square adam's apple,
sandy hair curling just above the earlobe,
dimple on right temple,
glossy white eyeball,
black pupil floating in blue iris.

His own pupils dilate with excitement. These details, he decides, astonished, mean something. Fragmented this way, disassociated from their source, these details remind him of something. . . . Indeed, he feels as if a forgotten room in his brain were opening to him now. The slivers of Elaina Mashermore—sandy hair, dimpled temple, freckled nose—reformulate spontaneously into a lucid vision of Hosana LaMême-Rire, his crush from sixth grade. He is alone, seated on a milk crate in the attic of a five-floor tree fort, contemplating Hosana's tiny

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school photograph and a note on perfumed violet stationery, thumbtacked to the wall:

April 11, 1972

Dear Vance Vance,

It's so groovy you want to go with me. I hope it doesn't bug you how I keep staring at you in History. My eyes get caught in the curls of hair curling on your collar, kind of like a brush gets caught in hair only much better. Please touch them for me in class (a signal if you dig so I'll know you're thinking about me). I wrote a poem about your curls do you want to hear it? It took me a long time, three days plus thinking it up.

The Curling Curls of Vance Vance

His curls are whirlies all swirling
like buttermilk yellowly whipping.
How sumptuously it would taste,
that lumpyish curlicue paste;
Much much would I treasure
to try such palatable pleasures.
Unfortunately, he's a bit snotty,
or maybe he's just la-tee-da-tee.
Quite hopeless, I hope for his kiss,
but sometimes encouraged by this:
While shaking his head to say no,
yellow curls disagree to and fro.
Like so,
like so,
like so.

Sorry about the snotty part, it was the only thing I could think of to rhyme with la-tee-da-tee. Not that you aren't a funny boy, I mean, hard to figure out, if you dig. It's what I like about you, though, the way you make me laugh. Good-bye, for now.

Love,

Hosana LaMême-Rire

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Oh, Hosana. It has been years since he's thought about her, but her visage returns to him now, pristine as a photograph. He kept that school picture and the perfumed note secreted away in the most inaccessible top room of the tree fort, a multiple-storied maze of split-levels and multiple passageways, some leading to dangling, vertiginous platforms, others to rooms without exit. He kept them even after he and Hosana had broken up, as momentos to display (among other secrets) to select friends or for browsing over in private moments. Most of these trinkets were eventually lost when the fort was dismembered, board by board (but suddenly while he was at school), according to orders by the fire department. By that time, anyway, he had given up contemplating Hosana's photo and poem.

He wrinkles his brow thoughtfully. Elaina asks:

—You're ready to leave, then?

He shakes his head. Laugh, please, he says.

—Beg your pardon?

—Laugh, he orders.

—Um? she giggles.

—Thank you. Just as I suspected.

—What the dickens are you talking about, Vance Vance? She giggles again nervously.

—Knew it! (Snapping his fingers.) That's the same laugh.

She stands on the table, tugs the ends of her sandy hair, shouts: Would somebody please tell me what the heck is going on here?

He begins to pace across the den, in ungainly strides, his right leg dragging behind the energetic left. As he speaks, specks of spit sail from his lips: Oh, I'll tell you what, yes ma'am. Fantastic coincidence, this is! Why, I've figured everything out now.

—And?

(Pointing:) You are not Elaina Mashermore.

She climbs down from the table, grunting before her white socks find the no-wax lavender floor, straightens the blue jumpsuit around her waist. So, she says, big deal. I never tell strangers my real name.

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He grins, stuffs both hands in the pockets of his black wool pants, and nods, saying: Very clever, Hosana.

—Hosana?

—That's right, Hosana LaMême-Rire. He chuckles. Did you think I'd forget? Did you really think I'd forget your love letters, our secret rendezvous, our first kiss? What a coincidence that you've moved into my old place.

She checks behind her, puzzled. She repeats: Hosana?

—No use playing around anymore, Hosana, he huffs: I remember, damn it. I say I remember, Hosana! He raps against the folding louvered doors, presses his eye against a crack.

—I'm sorry, she says, stepping back, but my name isn't Hosana either. It's Sue Dominus.

—Sue Dominus, you say? (Slapping his cheek.)

—Correct.

—No pulling my leg this time, I hope.

—What difference does it make to you, anyway? (Rolling her eyes.)

—What difference? he stammers. Why it makes all the difference! The difference between you and me, for instance. Between not-me and not-you. And you and not-you, me and not-me—

The phone rings. She apologizes, picks up the receiver, places it in the crook of her neck, answers "hello?" meanwhile signaling with the raised index finger of her left hand that he should wait one moment. He fishes in his shirt pocket, produces a kazoo, returns that, refishes, pulls out a plastic card—his driver's license. He slips this in the crease between the doors, jiggles it against the bolt, winces once, twice, pokes the tip of his tongue out one side of his mouth, jiggles the license again and curses (Dingdangit!) as it shoots out of his fingers and through the doors into the other room. He spots where it landed, face up, in the center of the no-wax floor, inches from Sue Dominus's white socks:

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DRIVER State of Ohio LICENSE
NUMBER 49D HE 495 OR 494 H5 H945
NAME Dale Maston STREET 3 Reedback
CITY Toledo OHIO ZIP 43623
DATE OF BIRTH 04-31-59 SEX M

His own photographed face in the left corner smiles fixedly at him. Damn, he whispers, his eye pinballing from license to Sue Dominus, license to Sue Dominus. She is saying:

—No, thank-you. Good-bye. No, really, I'm not interested. Well, that's probably affordable, but I—No, definitely not, so sorry. Good-bye—No, sir, it's like I said before. Yes, I am perfectly aware of that. But I'm not interested, so—Is that my answer, then? Yes—I mean it's no, no, no, like I've said a hundred—Hello?

She slams the receiver into its hook, grumbles: People are so impolite. Shaking her head, she turns to the folded doors, sees his eye staring through an eye-level crack, blinking at her.

—Salesman? he asks.

—Yeah. She steps toward him, stopping directly above his license. His photograph grins up at the vaginal crease of her blue jumpsuit.

—So annoying, those types, he says.

She nods, crossing her arms against her chest: Well, at least I know what they want from me. You, on the other hand: Vance Vance! (She is pointing at his eye.) Just what the heck do you want? Am I going to have to keep you locked in that den until my husband comes home?

—Bob, you mean?

—Actually, she says, his name is Rupert. But even he fibs about that, sometimes, because "Rupert" sounds so . . . well, somewhat uptight. I didn't kid you about the medicine and law degrees, though. That's the holy truth.

—And I believe you.

—But let's not get off the subject, Mr. Vance: What am I going to do about you? I've got beds to strip, dinner to prepare,

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a piano lesson to practice; in short, I've things to accomplish this afternoon besides entertaining strangers—

He interrupts: As your guest, then, I would like to request a favor.

—A favor! Go on, name it. I'm feeling charitable.

—I'll warn you: My request is a bit unusual.

—No juggling, she says, waving a hand. That's categorically out.

—Agreed. This merely requires a crowbar, perhaps an electric drill and some good chisels.

—Absolutely not.

—The sealed door in your basement.

—No way.

—I'll pay. One hundred dollars.

—She frowns: Not worth the mess.

—Five hundred. Six hundred. Seven—

—What, she gasps, could possibly be behind that door? She retreats two steps, glances down, spots the license, glossy and obvious against the lavender no-wax floor.

—Um, he says. . . . Dropped that. I, um—

She reaches for it, bending slowly at the knees, her left hand supporting the small bulge below her beltline while the right extends, drags the license closer to her body, then swoops it up. While she reads, he turns, hobbles to the leather sofa, reclines into a casual slump next to the heap of books he discarded there earlier. One by one, he chooses a book, inspects the cover and restacks it gently, neatly beside him. The titles betray no daft or prurient interests:

America's Middle West in Pictures
Look Younger, Live Longer
Eradicating Household Pests
Creating Fiscal Stability
Coping with the Death of Your Pet
Picture Dictionary of Dinghies
Ten Thousand Baby Names

He shuffles through this last book, pausing at names that

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have been starred once, twice or three times. Flipping to the end, he finds "Vance," unmarked. He squints, smirks, cocks his head. She is calling his name:

—Yoo-hoo, Dale Maston?

—Harrumph, he says, unpocketing a pen from his trousers. He draws three stars next to "Vance," identical in shape and size to the others.

—Dale Maston? (Making staccato chortles.) Yes, I see you now.

He doesn't answer.

—Oh, I beg your pardon: Vance Vance I meant to say, truly.

She heaves the table away from the folding doors, spins the latch free, and pushes wide the entrance to the den. A lemony odor from the kitchen wafts into the room. Still chortling, she says:

—Dale, you silly goose. Why it never occurred to me, I mean, you've matured so in appearance. I'm awful embarrassed for not, for making such a fuss, you know.

—Oh? (Wrinkling his brow.)

She strides across the den, sits opposite him in one of the matching leather chairs, examining him now unabashedly (baby-pink face, stubbled under the chin; bowl-cut hair, protruding ears) as if she expects to find something obvious, some clue, that had escaped her notice previously. He stands, waves good-naturedly at her compliments and repeated apologies.

—You always were a kidder, Dale. Why, that whole bit with the knives, and you saying I was Hosana What's-Her-Name; I just never guessed. Goodness, and me locking you in here, as if you were some wacko.

—No, no, I can't blame you. Sidestepping about randomly, he pauses finally between Sue Dominus and the doorway. The position affords him a clear view of the dining room and kitchen with lavender no-wax floor, the prep island and, just beyond that, the living room with oriental rugs. He springs through the folding doors of the den, spins on his stiff right leg, slams the doors together and secures the latch.

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—Dale! she blurts, still seated, astonished. Dale, for pete's sake, quit clowning around. I'm sorry I didn't recognize you.

—Whomever you're thinking of, he says, dragging the table back across the folding doors, it ain't me.

—You're not Dale Maston?

—Sure I am, but not the same lad you're remembering. From his shirt pocket, he whiffs out his kazoo, the polished brass surface of it glinting, the triple-meshed horn box humming sympathetically with his breath even before his lips close about the mouthpiece to sputter a curt fanfare: Doodly-dump-do-dip! I promise not to make too much of a mess, he quips, giving the table a final shove against the doors. He pauses, sniffs his armpits, nods approval, turns (she calling, Wait! Wait!), passes through the kitchen, into the living room, past the front door, doubles down a side hallway, swings wide the door to the basement, flicks the switch above the landing of the stairs leading into darkness. As the fluorescent bulbs warm and flutter on, the darkness grays by degrees, then disappears in artificial light. He begins down the wooden stairway, noting details:

dusty spider webs dangling from iron ceiling joists;
labyrinth of moist copper pipes and tin heating ducts;
rusty boiler squatting in center of concrete floor;
stacks of yellowed newspapers on particleboard slat;
millipedes (translucent, orange) scurrying on walls;
snow shovels, a broken stepladder, empty galvanized pails;
workbench with red vise, toolbox, stray nails, paint can;
disemboweled motorcycle with swoop handlebars;
engine parts soaking in aluminum pans of black oil.

He treads awkwardly, one hand lightly upon the railing, two dilated nostrils leading the way, smelling wet concrete and used motor oil. Down half the stairs, his left leg slips on a polished step, waxy smooth, and kicks forward, chorus-line correct: high, supinating slightly, rigid through the knee. If only he were a drum major or military officer in parade, salut-

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ing the master of ceremonies; instead, he's Dale Maston, wishing he were Vance Vance, skipping down the hard stairs feet first, eyes squeezed, landing not ungracefully in a plastic box of cat litter. (Funny, he didn't notice that cat litter.) His right leg, detached from the hip, tumbles after him, one step at a time, lands standing on the second to last. He stares at it, his leg, improbably upright, dressed in a low-heeled cowboy boot and tube sock. He wonders how it got out of his pants during the tumble, shrugs at that, kneads his bruised shoulder, brushes litter pebbles from his elbow. Tries to get up, unsuccessfully. At least one body part hurts, he decides, but can't figure out which, exactly.

—Holy ka-mole-ee. (Who said that?)

A shadow ripples down the stairs and stops, quivering, just before the detached leg. His eyes travel to its source: Sue Dominus also known as Elaina Mashermore, towering at the landing, hands shoved into her hips, mouth agape. Words rasp from the back of her throat:

—That's your leg.

—Artificial, he grunts, not real leg, not really me.

She begins down the stairs, in soft careful pad pad pads in her white socks. He struggles to sit up, tips the cat litter box, swears. One hand finds the stairs railing, the other pushes against the concrete floor, layered with pellets. Groaning, he stands on his left leg . . .

shirt rumpled, unbuttoned at the collar;
cat litter in his hair and eyebrows;
empty right pant leg dangling;
sunglasses, in shards, by his good foot

. . . seemingly okay, she thinks, in one piece, not counting the disconnected prosthetic. This he grabs, turns upside down, and tucks under his arm, low-heeled boot hooking the crook of his elbow.

—At least the cat litter is clean, she says, sitting now, midway down the stairs. Bobo was hit by a car a few months ago. Our Siamese.

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—Hit by a car, he agrees. He's figured out that it's his head that hurts, right where he thinks, normally. He tries thinking. Yes, definitely hurts there, he thinks, hurting thinking about thinking hurting.

—We've put the accident behind us, she says. We're coping now.

—Coping, yes. I know about that. Had a car accident myself.

—Oh?

—Me and Vance Vance, when we were thirteen, borrowed his parents' Oldsmobile for a spin. Vance said he knew how to drive, oh sure. We killed a motorcyclist, creamed him like a bug against the hood and windshield. It was bloody, hard to see. We were screaming, Vance swerved, maybe he didn't have his hands on the wheel, we hit a telephone pole. Most of me shot out the passenger door. Vance wasn't so lucky.

—Bought the farm?

—Yeah. (Leaning against the wall, sour faced.)

—Remorse for the death of a close friend, even a pet, is the birthplace of recovery.

—I remember everything, he says, all the miserable details.

—Reminiscence for his death is remuneration for your life.

—What are you talking about?

—Oh, that's from a book I read when Bobo died. I highly recommend it if you're having trouble coping. It's called— Well, on second thought maybe it wouldn't be appropriate for your case, Dale.

He nods, turns, hops into the basement, his right pant leg flopping as he goes, expertly slaloming about the pans of soaking engine parts, stray socket wrenches and empty pails. She follows down the stairs, finds him by the workbench, snugging the jaws of the vise around the boot of his artificial leg. He turns from the leg, erect between the vise jaws, says:

—Don't let me forget that.

—Or your sunglasses, she points for him, stepping by the shattered lenses sparkling in the overturned cat litter.

—Right. (Opening the toolbox now, rummaging its contents.)

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—Those are Rupert's tools.

He grunts, digs, pitches his selections on the workbench:

wide-mouthed pliers,
miniature mattock,
big monkey wrench,
levered screwdriver,
double-wedged crowbar,
foam-handled hammer,
masonry chisels.

Satisfied with that, he scoops the selected tools into both hands, saying:

—Before the Vances sealed that up (nodding at the door between the slat of yellowed newspapers and broken stepladder), Vance hid something very important inside.

—Do you know what it is?

—I've a good idea, yep. He hops to the door, a wooden door, peeling three flavors of paint, nailed shut in the corners, sealed by plaster at its edges. The hinges have rusted to a deep orange; the glass doorknob is hanging by its mechanical innards. He drops the tools on a bundle of newspapers, sorts them into a line, picks out the foam-handled hammer and a large chisel.

—Hold on. Nobody yet said you could—

—Living here, he interrupts, how many, five years, I'm surprised you've never wondered what's behind this door, why it's sealed.

—Sure, I've wondered, she says.

—Maybe there's something valuable in there: bricks of gold, a magic lamp, a singing bullfrog, the map or key to some other treasure.

(Frowning:) All unlikely, I think.

—Or a skeleton, he says. If there were a skeleton in here, you'd want it exhumed, wouldn't you?

—What are you saying; there's a corpse in my basement?

—I for one definitely wouldn't want to be living over some-

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body's old skull and bones. (Testing for a crumbly spot in the plaster with the chisel and hammer. Dust floats off the wall.)

She walks to the slat of newspapers, chooses the mattock from the row of tools, hefts it in her right hand, whispering, more at the pick than at him: Let's get this done before Rupert comes home.

—Great!

He swings the hammer into the chisel and a nugget of plaster breaks from the wall, falls and bursts into fragments by his foot. She takes the other side of the door, fracturing the plaster into cobwebs with precisely delivered blows of the mattock. They work without speaking, he sitting intermittently on the newspapers to rest his leg, she taking advantage of his absences to swing the mattock, teeth clenched, with both hands, against the sealed edges. When most of the plaster has been dislodged and kicked aside into mounds of crumbs and broken cakes, they extract the nails from the corners of the door and its frame. Several come out as if oiled. Others have been driven into knots or moist beams, and their heads break in the tongs of the hammer.

—Give me the crowbar, she says. His left hand flips the hammer, end over end, to the right, which grabs the crowbar from the row of tools and tosses it just before the foam-handled shaft of the hammer lands perfectly in palm. Milliseconds later, the crowbar smacks softly in his left hand.

—No juggling, please. (Snatching the crowbar.)

—Sorry.

She wedges it into the top left corner of the door, where a nail broke, and pushes against the leverage. Sweat drools in wet lines down her dusty cheeks; a blue vein bulges lengthwise along her neck. At last, in curt squeaks, the corner of the door works free of the nail. She wrestles out the crowbar, stuffs it again under the lower left corner, breathing hard, saying:

—Your turn, now.

He lowers himself into a kneel, grips the crowbar with both hands, yanks violently until the door pops loose from the frame. The crowbar clangs against the concrete floor where he drops it.

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—That should do, he says.

She tugs the displaced top corner of the door. It opens, squealing on its hinges, exhaling moldy air and dust. They squint into the dankness, she puckering her mouth, he sneezing. Light from the fluorescent lamps penetrates, saturates the room slowly, like liquid into a sponge. They see nothing, then next to nothing:

a square, oppressive space;
walls of purplish concrete;
dust blanketing the floor;
a Shaker chair, missing arms, sitting in the corner.

—Got a flashlight? he asks.

She dashes to the workbench, finds one—industrial length, heavy—tosses it to him from several feet away. He catches it in one hand, turns, points the beam in the direction of the Shaker chair. Grinning, he hops through the doorway and into the room, splashing singleton bootprints in the dust behind him. She watches, not entering, wondering about radon and other invisible dangers.

—Aha! he exclaims. (Flashlight beam illuminating a bump in the dust near the chair.)

—What is it? Pick it up so I can see.

He does, bending flamingo-like at the knee, his hand disappearing in a gray cloud before re-emerging with a small velvet bag, containing something rectangular. He jams the flashlight in his armpit, opens the bag, extracts a leather-bound book. Laughing:

—It's like getting exactly what you wanted on your birthday.

—Well, what is it? she demands. Did I open this godforsaken room for a stupid book?

—Stupid book? he gasps. No, no, this is not just any stupid book! It's the only copy of the diary of Vance Vance; it's the diary of a genius.

She rolls her eyes: Oh, terrific. Just what I was hoping for too: the diary of some knuckleheaded adolescent. I hope you understand, you, what a disaster—Wait a moment. (Lis-

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tening, neck arched, studying the brass pipes in the ceiling.) Oh dear.

—What?

—Shh! (Listening.) Yes, that's the garage door, all right.

—Rupert? he asks.

—Yes, definitely.

—Is that bad?

—Look, Vance, I mean Dale. Stay in this womb—room I mean—okay?

—I will not, if you please! Hopping now to the door.

She stabs her index finger against his nose, forbidding him pass: Only for a minute, she says. I'll let you out once he's showering or something. Please, I don't want a confrontation.

—Confrontation? What do you mean, confrontation?

—Just stay put, and there won't be one. She forces the door closed (heedless of his stammered protestations: But, but, but—), wincing at the groan of the hinges. She turns to go, remembers the tools, comes back, gathers them in her arms, skips to the workbench, dumps them in the toolbox with a great clatter. Seeing his artificial leg caught in the vise, she swears (Dang it), yanks the boot from the red jaws and, deliberating for an instant, finally stuffs the whole item in the toolbox.

—Don't let me forget that. (His voice muffled by the heavy old door.)

—Shush! Don't make a sound now.

She slaloms for the staircase, sees his sunglasses, kicks those under some cat litter, climbs the stairs, blowing air through her cheeks at each step, wondering whether she might induce labor in the second trimester. At the landing, she flicks off the basement fluorescents, exits and slams the door behind her. Listening: Rupert's heavy feet are brushing against the doormat at the garage entrance, first one, then the other, then the first again. She sprints, or waddles rather, belly leading the rest of her body, down the hallway, past the entrance to the front door, into the living room, stops. His cap and reversible corduroy jacket are reposed upon the couch. Just like a kid, she thinks: dropping things everywhere. She balls up the jacket

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and crams it inside the piano bench, under some scores. The lid doesn't flush with one corner, so she opens the bench again, takes out a book of chromatic exercises, places that on the leaves of the baby grand, closes the bench again, this time satisfactorily. Now his hat. She scans the living room, ruminates, chooses the underside of an oriental rug.

The garage door opens. Rupert calls:

—I'm home.

—Hello, dear, she answers, ducking into the kitchen. She spots a white dishtowel folded next to the microwave, unfurls it under cold water from the faucet, scrubs her face. The towel darkens. She finishes, wrings black water into the sink drain, frowns, pitches the towel into the garbage, on top of some fragrant brown banana peels.

The garage door closes, locks. Rupert's camel-hair coat dangles on a hanger. She hears him plod down the side hallway, approach the basement door, still closed, pass it, pop into the foyer at the front door. His briefcase thuds on the carpeted stairs leading to the second floor. He calls:

—What's that noise, dear?

—Oh? Nothing. She's dragging the dining room table back into the center of the room. The table legs have crisscrossed the lavender no-wax floor with dull streaks. She tries rubbing them with her foot, notices that her previously white socks are now sooty to the ankles, gasps—

—Wheere aare youu? Rupert sings from the living room.

—Bathroom. (Voice answering through the closed door next to the rotary wall phone.)

Rupert enters the kitchen, the dining room, remarks: Smells like a gymnasium in here. He saunters into the den, sees the books—seven stacked neatly on the couch, others scattered with pages interfolding and spines doubled backwards—swears (Geez-o-pete) and begins reshelving them in alphabetical order, except *Ten Thousand Baby Names*, which he places on the end table next to the stained-glass vanity box. Having reshelved the last book, he walks to the print, the abstract print (splatters of reds and cobalt blue), feels under the lower

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lefthand corner, frowns, returns to the couches, tries the drawer of the end table, brows raising when it opens, mouth dropping and sort of bouncing at the jaw upon finding it empty. He grabs the stained-glass vanity box, discovers it locked, rattles it gently, hears the remote inside, and (face purpling) replaces the box on the end table. Shaking his head, he sits in the leather chair, picks up the book, *Ten Thousand Baby Names*, begins scanning names from the end—first the *Z*'s, then the *Y*'s, the *X*'s, the *W*'s—breathes deeply, calls:

—Dear? Dear?

—Just a minute, she hollers, from the bathroom. The sink faucet is blasting cold water into her hands. She unwraps a new bar of soap, throws the paper into a pile of dirty wadded-up balls of toilet paper, lathers the fat white bar between her palms, runs suds up to her elbows, scrubs. In the mirror, she inspects herself . . .

hair in filthy clumps,
dirty liquid dripping from her square chin,
black rings around her neck,
gray jumpsuit smoking with dust

. . . half grins, half scowls, spots dirt between her teeth and gums, sucks water from the faucet, sloshes it around her mouth, spits into the drain. Bending, she yanks off another ribbon of toilet paper, wads it up with water, wipes her neck, flips it into the pile on the counter. Everything is dirty, even the bathroom now: pink rug soiled, faucet smudged, marble sink splattered with soot. Dirty, dirty, she mutters, everything dirty. She scoops and plops the dirty balls of toilet paper into the toilet, pulls the handle, watches clean water swirl into the dirty bowl.

—What's going on in there, dear? Rupert calls. His index finger is marking "Vance" in the book. He chuckles, shakes his head: Come on, quit clowning around.

Directly below the bathroom, in the sealed basement room, this guy, Dale, is sitting on the Shaker chair with no arms,

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squinting at the brittle pages of Vance Vance's diary, translucified by the long flashlight clenched in his armpit. The room is cozy, he's decided, temperate and still, the only sound being a gentle gurgling of liquid through pipes in the purple walls. He can wait here a long time, months, even. The diary of Vance Vance pulsates in his hands, like a living thing. He begins translating another page, this one written in numeric code, guffawing as he educes the meaning. Other pages have been written backwards, in hieroglyphics, or with invented languages. He recognizes them all, everything really being one code, the secret code of clowns, not learned in any school, but passed on from generation to generation in small, dark, hidden places.

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Three Poems by Kathy Fagan

There Are Plenty of Angels, *She Said in the* LADIES,

in the rest area LADIES *on the road to*
Terre Haute. Plenty of angels, *she said again*.
But not one, I've heard, not a single one
will mission to the fade as it does to the darkness.
A stall door latched. Her bag got hung.
Seen that sign, back west a ways?
The one on the warehouse, in a movie marquee?
Blessed Hope, it says. Blessed Hope, *she said*.
It's meant to be a sign from heaven,
but hope's, I'd say, more a human invention,
like freeways, *she said*. Funny word, *she said*.
They call 'em highways when you pay to ride 'em.
Mama's buried off one in Missouri. Had her
forty years and forty days on earth.
And the day we did it was a noisy day,
all out-o'-doors like a day at the beach:
the tearin' down sounds of the sun and the wind,
clouds and trees, grass and stones,
a noticeably notice-me-I'm-nature
nature sound. Mother never did care much
for nature. Enjoyed a sunset well enough.
Those shameless ones like colored candy,
those ones can look like wall-to-wall
in a Cineplex foyer: pinks and purples, reds, *she said*.
It was so noisy, anyway, that day
even the birds shut up for once.
Or got their singin' drownded out.
But I could hear when the box hit bottom:
Get on with it, is what it sounded like to me—
She had dried her hands on a paper towel—
I'm done here.

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Her Advice to the Still Life Painter

Limes.
Three limes or
three peeled kiwi maybe but
not grapes.
To get proper grapes you've got to
breathe on them some,
fog 'em up, thin the skins.
There's something dark at the heart of a grape,
like a lake that way or the unborn's eyes.
And I don't mean to criticize but
dim-lit, son,
is how grapes are,
like ice that don't reflect no more—
snowy, thick old, hoary ice:
"To hoary age I shall bear you on.
I have made you and I shall sustain you . . ."
Bible, you know.
No? So, no. You go and
scrub grapes, skin grapes, polish grapes, or buff grapes—
they'll still end up more pearls 'an diamonds.
And what you have here, young man,
is diamonds: pure and simple,
tough and shiny, ever and all manner of light inside.
And you don't want that. Now,
who does? You want pearls? You want
grapes? What you want can roll. What you want can hide.

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California, *She Replied*

It's driving into all that goldness makes
You blind, *she said*. The road oats, timothy,
The mustard hung beside the highway like
So many crowns thrown out, *she said*. That ma-
Ma cow who cools her thin blond ankles in
A shiny ditch? Her baby's bones hurt—it's
The newness. Poplars, too, they have their secrets
With each other. Seen them at it in my
Rearview, whisperin' where the smoke trees get to
Once the mist's burnt off. Why, I was in a
'Nother country by the time I knew, myself,
Where I live comfortably, to this day,
She ended, without question.

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Billy Collins

On Turning Ten

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light—
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche,
or a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

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This is the beginning of sadness I say to myself
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.
It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I would shine.
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

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Steven Cramer

The Anniversary

Not just because a child draws him—pie-faced and frontal,
Grinning—it's hard to watch the man's head and hands
take shape
From a black magic marker, despite the other colors in the box:
The sparse hair on his forehead, the eye-orbits without pupils,
A hook, like an inverted question mark, to signify the nose,
And his mouth a lipless grimace, really a snarl.

Two *X*s represent what might have touched, waved, even spanked,
And the eyes' white squint might be the child's memory
Of the man's manic visitations: those babblings of happiness
Sweeping through the house, until everyone in his wake
Went a little crazy too, slugged dumb by his anecdotes about
the war,
Words misfiring like the Spitfire he'd mimic, arms flung wide
like wings.

But now the child sketches the woman: mouth upturned
(As he works on this he nibbles his lip, and squints,
and frowns),
Her lips a rich scarlet—which, like her orange hair,
seem to ignite
As he deepens the red to widen her smile, then adds
wife-like loyalty
With brown pupils in the corners of her eyes, then
darkens them,
So she lavishes regard on her husband who can't look back.

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Again he reaches for black, blocks out a torso, neck and arms;
Stops. Compared to her, the husband's just a tracing.
But they're both dispiritingly flat. They'd be cold to the touch.
If you were the parents discovering this sketch—in his toy box
Or between the box spring and mattress of his bed—
you'd worry.
Now the marker scratches at the spot where their hands meet,

But instead of hands, he scrawls a tangle of lines,
A net that grows and seems to fix them there. And still
He's not finished, one hand hovering above the bright colors,
His face wrinkling, relaxing, until at last he chooses green—
For jealously? for ghosts? for a feeling he can't name?—
And writes across the top: *The Anniversary*. Puts his marker
in the box

Because he thinks he's done. Takes it out again. Adds a date.
Looks up.

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Anna Rabinowitz

Through Many Waters, Leaf-Light, the Tree

Drones out brittle, weary invocations, the certainty
of fruit now distant as the first word
On God's tongue. Such disarray. So much leaf-rot,
leaf-loss, leaf-ache heaped up. No
Petiole, no rib, no vein, no heart unscathed by know-
ledge of its plight. Apprenticed to a sleep
Purged of epoch, a terrain seasoned with what remains
unnamed when alphabets crowd up
Earth-logged, victims of predictable defection. No
word, no phrase avails (exists?) to make whole
Language which drops everything soon or late while
we try to beat back decay like mongrel
Ghosts of fleshly (fleshless?) selves. Out of enclosure,
into enclosure. Mouthing our lines. Straining
After meaning. This rabble of leaf, these mute trees,
and this late-leaning, fast-fading appoggiatura
Narrowing down to prayer beside a blue window. The
familiar after-feeling peers in,
Gazes out. Alter ego, friend or foe, our deepest wish
lies on the other side of the bog
Eternitied to might have been. What can I do, where
can I go? Whether I run or stand stock-still, no tongue
Restrains this next life as it passes into your eye, this
last silence as it oceans to your ear.

for Marilyn Bergner, 1933–1992

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Diana Trilling

An Interview

Diana Trilling was born in New York in 1905. A graduate of Radcliffe College, she began her literary career at The Nation *where she was fiction critic from 1941 to 1949. Since then she has written on literary, social and political subjects for virtually every periodical, from the most popular to the most scholarly, including such publications as* Mademoiselle, The American Scholar, The New Leader, Redbook, Partisan Review *and* The New York Times Book Review.

In addition to her essays and book reviews Mrs. Trilling has edited the Portable D.H. Lawrence *(1947) and* The Selected Letters of D.H. Lawrence *(1958). Her other books include*

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Claremont Essays *(1964),* We Must March My Darlings *(1977) and* Mrs. Harris: The Death of the Scarsdale Diet Doctor (1981). *She is also the editor of the twelve-volume uniform edition of the works of her late husband, Lionel. Her most recent book is a memoir entitled* The Beginning of the Journey (1993).

She is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has served on the editorial board of The American Scholar. *She has been the recipient of two John Simon Guggenheim Fellowships (one in 1950 and the other in 1991) as well as grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

Trilling is the mother of one son, James, and has two granddaughters. She makes her home in New York City. Most summers she spends the month of August on Cape Cod. This interview took place on a Saturday afternoon, after she had finished her work for the day, and was conducted in the living room of her spacious apartment near Columbia University, the same apartment she shared with her husband. It is filled with their things—Italian and Japanese prints and photographs by their friend Walker Evans. Books are everywhere—sets of Freud, Proust, T.S. Eliot and Dickens. They line the walls of the hallway and the dining room; more books and galleys from publishers, are piled on tables.

Trilling is already at work on a new book. She spends part of her day dictating to a secretary, who then types it up for her to read. Impaired vision makes it impossible for her to type now, but she does do the corrections herself, slowly and meticulously, with the help of a huge bright lamp and magnifying glass.

"Old age is not for sissies," she says.

At eighty-eight she is a striking woman—alluring, highly feminine. Her dress is simple—plain shirtwaists and flowing skirts; she wears her brown hair swept back from her face. She speaks in a cultivated melodious voice, the result of years of singing lessons. As a young girl she planned to be an opera singer until a thyroid condition made that impossible.

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What is finally most impressive about Mrs. Trilling is her energy. When Salman Rushdie's life was threatened she joined writers such as Susan Sontag in a giant protest demonstration at PEN. She has opinions about everything from the Gulf War (which she supported) to the texture and quality of chocolate. ("Hershey's Kisses are the best," she laughed "I love'em.") She works seven days a week. To save her strength she goes out only on weekends, but she does entertain—many friends drop by for tea or for a drink. During the interview she sat on her favorite sofa by the telephone, hands clasped loosely in her lap, listening intently to the questions posed. She went over every subject discussed, sometimes saying with gentle firmness, "That isn't a very good question. Wouldn't it be better if you phrased it like this?"

INTERVIEWER

Your memoir is entitled *The Beginning of the Journey*. Do you believe the start of one's life is the most interesting part?

DIANA TRILLING

Definitely.

INTERVIEWER

How do you remember yourself as a little girl?

TRILLING

I was a very lost little girl, very frightened. We had a Polish maid who was always telling me horrendous stories about children being chopped into little pieces by burglars and thrown into pickle barrels. And there was a crazy woman who lived in the next house: she thought she had microbes in her hair, and she used to be up all night, combing her hair and knocking out the bugs on the window sill. And, of course, there was Jack the Ripper. I thought he lived around the corner. We lived in Larchmont and New Rochelle until I was nine. Larchmont was very rural. I remember sliding on haystacks and, in

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winter, when there were heavy snow storms, a bell used to toll in the firehouse to tell us that there was no school. That was a very long time ago. I was born in 1905. I've lived the whole century.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know what you wanted to be very early on?

TRILLING

I wanted to be lots of things: a Latin teacher, a gym teacher. I wanted to run a tea room. . .

INTERVIEWER

You went to Radcliffe at age sixteen—

TRILLING

Yes, much too young; but in those days lots of kids went to college at sixteen. Lionel did, too. If you were a halfway decent student, you were constantly being skipped in grade school. There was nothing unusual about entering high school at twelve.

INTERVIEWER

What was your major at Radcliffe? Were you planning to be a writer?

TRILLING

I majored in fine arts, and I don't know that I can say that I planned to be anything. When I was graduating, one of my professors, the famous professor Paul Sachs, offered me a job as his assistant at the Fogg Museum—he was the director there. I turned it down. He also offered me the job of starting a fine arts department at Mt. Holyoke. But I didn't even consider it. I just came home to New York like a dutiful daughter. In those days that was what a middle-class Jewish girl was supposed to do.

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INTERVIEWER

At this point were you writing?

TRILLING

I guess I was always doing some kind of writing. Random. Undirected. I was a college reporter for a Boston newspaper, and I wrote poems. I wouldn't want to read them today. I didn't think about writing as a profession. I don't think that the idea of being a professional writer ever entered my head.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't you take a job for a while after you graduated from college and got back to New York?

TRILLING

I worked at the National Broadcasting Company for someone who ran a children's radio program. It wasn't a very useful thing to do because I had begun to study singing. I had always sung, all my life, but it wasn't until I got out of college that I thought of it as a career. Even then it was my teacher's idea, not mine—she wanted to train me for opera. Taking charge of a bunch of child actors certainly wasn't designed to help me have a career as an opera singer. Obviously I wasn't serious.

INTERVIEWER

You didn't take yourself seriously?

TRILLING

I hadn't been brought up to take myself seriously, and my expensive education didn't do very much to teach me to take myself seriously and make something of my life.

INTERVIEWER

How about Lionel Trilling. Did he take you seriously?

TRILLING

Lionel took me seriously on all fronts.

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INTERVIEWER

Where did you two meet?

TRILLING

At a speakeasy. We were introduced by Polly and Kip [Clifton] Fadiman. Lionel had known Kip at Columbia. I knew him and Polly in high school. They introduced us because of our names—Lionel and Diana. They liked the way the names sounded together.

INTERVIEWER

Was it love at first sight?

TRILLING

Attraction at first sight.

INTERVIEWER

What was your first impression of Lionel Trilling?

TRILLING

That he was very good-looking, gentle, courteous, rather melancholy; a lot going on beneath the surface. As time went on I discovered that he was one of the most tenacious people, but I didn't know about qualities of that kind to start with.

INTERVIEWER

What did your family think of him?

TRILLING

The night Lionel and I got engaged I'd invited him to dinner. I'd planned a special supper, but then I couldn't join the family at dinner because I'd come down with a raging sore throat. After the meal everybody trooped into my bedroom, pulled up chairs around my bed, and I croaked, "Father, Lionel and I are going to get married." With that my father stormed out the door, but not before he said, "Two damn fools don't

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get married!" My brother Sam came through like a real brother. "We should have a drink on this," he told everybody, and he ran out and brought back a bottle of liquor, some glasses, and we toasted each other around my bed.

INTERVIEWER

Why was your father so upset?

TRILLING

I think he was hurt that Lionel hadn't asked for my hand in a formal way. Also, my father didn't know whether Lionel could earn a living.

INTERVIEWER

How *did* he earn a living?

TRILLING

He was teaching in the extension division at Hunter College. That was piece work. I think it paid $3.65 an hour for an undergraduate class.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever have the desire to teach?

TRILLING

Not long after we were married Lionel got the flu, and we were so dead broke that I taught one of his classes for him. It was a nightmare. I had to teach a book I'd never read—a book of Ruskin's. It was the first and last time I ever taught a class.

INTERVIEWER

How did you prepare?

TRILLING

I didn't. Lionel had just thought of substituting me for him five minutes before I walked out the door. I thought I'd be able

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to prepare on the bus—we were living on upper Claremont Avenue—it was a long ride down to Hunter College. But I ran into a girl on the bus I hadn't seen for ages so I spent the entire time talking to her. The class was a graduate class—there were only three students, and one of them was a beautiful girl—brilliant—who was also madly in love with Lionel. She gave me a very hard time. Since then I have never been able to speak in public without written notes.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of writing was Lionel doing at that time?

TRILLING

When I first knew him he had dreams of becoming a novelist; he was writing essays but also short stories; he had a group of friends at Columbia like Henry Rosenthal, Herbert Solow, Edgar Johnson who wrote the big book on Dickens; Mark Van Doren was their teacher; they were all very gifted intellectually; they would talk together, and I would listen, and pretty soon I was beginning to think well—better than I ever had before. It was an extraordinary opportunity—the start, actually, of my education. When Lionel was Norton Lecturer at Harvard in 1969 and 1970, we were invited to give a joint talk in one of the Radcliffe houses. The master of the house introduced us and the first question put to me was, "What courses did you take at Radcliffe to prepare you to be a critic?" I'm afraid I was very rude because I said that at Harvard I didn't learn anything about being a critic.

INTERVIEWER

How much of an influence was Lionel on your literary style . . .?

TRILLING

I influenced Lionel's writing much more than he influenced mine. The family formulation is: Lionel taught me how to think—to think as a literary person—and I taught him how

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to write. If you look at Lionel's early writing before we were married, you'll see what I'm talking about. He went on then to develop his own splendid style, which I couldn't equal. He had the mind, the capacity; I shaped the prose. He taught me how to think critically.

INTERVIEWER

How did he do that?

TRILLING

Just by talking. It wasn't a pedagogic or didactic situation. It happened as a natural by-product of our being together. I was a very good student in a course he wasn't giving. Our life wasn't a classroom. He never undertook to teach me in the sense that F. Scott Fitzgerald taught Sheilah Graham. He didn't lecture me or prescribe reading lists, heaven forbid. It was just a matter of association.

INTERVIEWER

Could you give me an example of how he taught you to think?

TRILLING

It was just the way he himself talked about books and ideas. He had great taste and clarity of thought. He read prodigiously. So I learned from him. I absorbed what I could from his talk.

INTERVIEWER

Did you argue—you would take one side of an intellectual discussion, and he would take the other?

TRILLING

Oh, God, no! He just lived his life, and I lived with him. His friends were professional intellectuals, which mine had not been. I listened to Lionel talk with his friends, and pretty soon their professional idiom became mine. This doesn't mean

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that I had to agree with what they were saying. Very often I did not. But unconsciously I was learning their method of thought. Being an intellectual has its techniques. I write about this in some detail in my book. In the twenties Columbia helped to create what in the middle of the century we came to know as "criticism," the very exigent application of intelligence to literature, politics, society, ideas in general. To some extent City College and New York University shared this enterprise, but I think that Columbia was preeminently the birthplace of twentieth-century criticism, as we knew it. I think this was due to the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. They brought with them the Talmudic tradition of what I call "significant contention." It was largely a New York phenomenon.

INTERVIEWER

But that's all over now?

TRILLING

Yes, dead.

INTERVIEWER

Is there no longer an intellectual elite?

TRILLING

Not as it existed in the earlier decades of this century. It flowered in the thirties and forties and began to die in the sixties and at the time of the Vietnam War.

INTERVIEWER

What has replaced it?

TRILLING

For one thing, the institutionalization and even the bureaucratization of certain ideas about progress, justice, democracy. Our culture has become very authoritarian and absolute about what is meant by democracy—both on the left and on the

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right; argument and contention are regarded as virtually treasonable. The critical elite has also been replaced by the scholarly elite in the universities, experts in all sorts of esoteric fields of knowledge, little pockets of specialized learning. These of course have always existed in the universities but they've never been so heavily populated. Sometimes these experts are called upon to address controversial issues in public policy, but these tend to be political, not critical exercises. They don't have any of the moral urgency that we associated with criticism.

INTERVIEWER

You started your writing career at *The Nation*. How did that come about?

TRILLING

That was a happy accident. Margaret Marshall, the literary editor of *The Nation*, phoned to ask Lionel if he knew someone to do the short, unsigned book notes on fiction for the magazine. I overheard the conversation and offered myself for the job. The notes were done well enough, and after a few months in that I began to write an occasional signed review, and a short while later I was given my own column, "Fiction in Review." For the next eight years I read a novel a day virtually every day of the week.

INTERVIEWER

Re-reading those reviews, I see you picked a number of classics—like Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*, Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* . . .

TRILLING

I'm afraid I had reservations about all of those. Especially the Waugh. The novels of the forties were very simplistic; they didn't provide us with many full-scale heroes or very complicated notions of society. By and large the public took moral predicaments pretty seriously during the 1940s. But oddly, many novelists didn't. The novelists who did and thought of

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themselves as politically conscious were likely to write novels of bad conscience. They were always feeling guilty for not being sufficiently radical.

INTERVIEWER

Did politics increasingly play a role in your development as a writer?

TRILLING

A very large role. Cultural politics, I mean; the politics that most directly bear upon the moral life of intellectuals. By the time I began at *The Nation* I had a firmly defined cultural-political position as an anti-Communist. Even as a reviewer of fiction I had so-to-speak a political platform. You must keep it in mind that this was the forties and that in the forties it would not have been possible to be a decent fiction reviewer without dealing with the politics, overt or concealed, of the novels you reviewed. Even the thrillers were political.

INTERVIEWER

The lineup of writers on *The Nation* was extraordinary: I.F. Stone on politics, James Agee on movies, Clement Greenberg on art, B.H. Haggin on music, Fred Dupee and Randall Jarrell on poetry, Irving Howe and Reinhold Neibuhr on non-fiction, yet you left *The Nation* in 1949. Why?

TRILLING

I was tired of reviewing current fiction. I wanted to turn my hand to longer pieces. I've always been interested in covering cases—in covering trials. As you may know, I wrote at some length about the Hiss-Chambers and Robert Oppenheimer security hearings. I wrote about the Profumo sex scandals for *Partisan Review*. Actually, if I'd had the strength I would have wanted to cover the William Kennedy Smith date rape case; I thought it was so unfairly handled by the press. Every journalist was out to do a hatchet job on Teddy Kennedy. Maybe even the whole Kennedy family as well. They didn't concentrate on the nuances of the case. It was not all black and white.

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INTERVIEWER

Back in the thirties when you were a Communist, did you ever think of joining the party?

TRILLING

Oh, never. Even at my most ardent, I was never anything but a fellow traveler. Let me make this plain to you. Most of the people we used to refer to as Communists were not party members. I don't think Sidney Hook, who introduced Lionel and me to communism at Yaddo, was ever a member of the party. Recently I heard that Lillian Hellman had been a member very briefly, but a person like her was far more valuable to the party by working on the outside, where she could always say that she was of independent mind and not under orders from the party.

INTERVIEWER

Did you go to meetings?

TRILLING

Very early on in the period of my ardor I got involved with a group called the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. It was an "innocents club." It was the way in which the Communist party got the support of non-party intellectuals and cultural figures—by creating phoney committees. "Innocents Clubs" we called them when we became disenchanted and knowledgeable about them.

INTERVIEWER

Was *The Nation* anti-Communist?

TRILLING

That's the interesting point about *The Nation* in the forties. It was really two magazines. The front of the book was presided over by Freda Kirchwey, the editor of the magazine, and the back of the book—the books and arts section—was the province of Margaret Marshall, the literary editor. The front of the

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book was greatly influenced by Kirchwey's close associate, a Spanish exile named Julio del Vayo. He denied being a Communist, but he may have been a Soviet agent: his life was devoted to the support of the Soviet Union. The back of the book was anti-Communist, and the remarkable thing was that the two political points of view coexisted the way they did. Freda Kirchwey, despite her domination by Julio del Vayo, truly believed in freedom of speech. At least that was certainly true during my time. She never interfered with Margaret Marshall or in anything I wrote. Unfortunately this ended in the 1950s. By that time I'd left the magazine.

INTERVIEWER

Did your political positions change?

TRILLING

I became an anti-Communist in the early thirties and have remained an anti-Communist ever since. This happened as a result of my experience working in a Communist Innocents Club. Several of the people who shared their experiences and became similarly disenchanted with Communism at that time were Trotskyists, but I was not, although in one of her late autobiographies Mary McCarthy says that I was. She's mistaken. But we anti-Communist liberals were a small handful of people relative to the large number of intellectuals who continued to attach their idealism to Stalin's Russia. Then along came Joseph McCarthy. The McCarthy period changed the way that the political sides were drawn. Before McCarthy it was only supporters of Communism who were opposed to anti-Communists. This changed in the McCarthy years. What happened was that anyone who was opposed to Communism was supposed to be identified with McCarthy and came to be thought of as reactionary. Earlier no one had thought that being against the Soviet Union made one a right-winger. A proper distinction was made between liberal anti-Communism and right-wing anti-Communism. People who were not anti-Communist now designated themselves anti-anti-Communists.

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INTERVIEWER

It seems very complicated to me. Can you give me an example of somebody who was an anti-anti-Communist?

TRILLING

Mary McCarthy is a very good example. She became actively anti-anti-Communist. This did not for a moment mean that she was pro-Communist. She was never pro-Communist until the Vietnam War. She became pro-North Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER

How did this express itself?

TRILLING

She wanted to start an anti-anti-Communist magazine. She even thought of going to law school so that she could be a defense counsel for people who were attacked by McCarthy.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't you once call her a thug?

TRILLING

What?

INTERVIEWER

In reference to her writing in *The Company She Keeps* . . .

TRILLING

Where in hell am I supposed to have said that?

INTERVIEWER

I think you said it in conversation.

TRILLING

With whom? No, that makes me angry. It's not the way I would have talked about her. I once characterized her with a phrase attributed to her because it was witty. I never got credit for it. I said she was a "starry-eyed opportunist."

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INTERVIEWER

After the thirties many abandoned their political stances . . .

TRILLING

That has long fascinated me—how many people I knew moved away from the original political beliefs they embraced in the 1930s. I started to do an oral history of the New York intellectual community between 1925 and 1975. I wanted to trace the evolution of disparate philosophies, to examine ideological differences. I interviewed Dwight McDonald, Clement Greenberg, Michael Harrington, Irving Howe and many others. Some people refused to be taped, and then my funding dried up. What was striking about the recollections I did tape was not just how much people differed politically but how fierce their commitments were. Back in the 1950s friendships were made and broken on the basis of political beliefs alone. We used to argue so intensely at our parties. What was characteristic about a lot of those arguments was the ugly level of distrust, suspicion, back-biting and uneasiness. But *Partisan Review* parties were primarily political affairs. They had their own social strain. Both Edna Phillips and Natalie Rahv used to tell me that whenever they acted as hostesses for these *Partisan Review* parties they had to have a few stiff drinks before the guests arrived so that they could get through the evening. It was invariably an ordeal. There was little lightheartedness in this high intellectual community we're talking about. These were all people who were supposedly shaping thought and opinion in our culture, and yet they had very little notion of civilized disagreement between friends, as you or I would define it, very little notion of loyalty.

INTERVIEWER

Do you exempt your husband, Lionel Trilling?

TRILLING

Yes, I certainly do. He never said a mean thing to anyone, and never spoke behind people's backs. He was too civilized—he had too much grace.

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INTERVIEWER

Tell me something about "the girls"—Elizabeth Hardwick and Mary McCarthy. . . .

TRILLING

I don't know who started calling us "the girls." But there we were: Elizabeth Hardwick, Mary McCarthy, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, Bea Kristol and Sylvia Marlowe, who somehow had honorary membership . . . she was such an intelligent musician. Plus me.

INTERVIEWER

All friends?

TRILLING

No, we weren't all friendly at all. Hannah Arendt never said hello to me in her life.

INTERVIEWER

Why was that?

TRILLING

She probably wanted to go to bed with Lionel. That was usually the reason when women weren't pleasant to me.

INTERVIEWER

Many of you wrote for the *Partisan Review*.

TRILLING

We were the girls invited to *Partisan Review* parties. That was really it, I guess.

INTERVIEWER

Who would one find at those parties?

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TRILLING

I don't know. Jean Stafford, Delmore Schwartz, Will Barrett, Philip Rahv, William Phillips, Alfred Kazin, Irving Kristol and Sidney Hook . . . It depended on what was going on. I can remember one party where e.e. cummings was the star.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't you have a disagreement with Alfred Kazin?

TRILLING

I've never *not* had a disagreement with Alfred Kazin. We have been disagreeing since the day we were born. Lionel was going to hit him once, and I don't know why I didn't let him.

INTERVIEWER

What was it?

TRILLING

He said to Lionel, "When are you going to disassociate yourself from that wife of yours?"

INTERVIEWER

Where were the parties held?

TRILLING

Usually at Edna and William Phillips's house or at the Rahvs' house. They both lived in brownstones, with large living rooms in which they could have enormous parties. The drinking was stupendous in those days.

INTERVIEWER

People got unruly?

TRILLING

Not quite. People didn't behave well because they were deeply unmannerly people. Apparently, the only intellectual who had good manners was Lionel; it was such a rare commod-

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ity. He didn't go around making people feel miserable, which all the others did.

INTERVIEWER

On occasion he was going to hit them though . . .

TRILLING

He was going to hit the overtly unpleasant ones.

INTERVIEWER

That's mannerly, why not?

TRILLING

Of course. He couldn't just stand there and let his wife be insulted. There were plenty of times when I would have liked him to hit someone.

INTERVIEWER

What awkward, strange parties they must have been.

TRILLING

Awkward, strange people having awkward, strange gatherings, you're quite right.

INTERVIEWER

Did what happened at those parties somehow get absorbed—contained—in the magazine?

TRILLING

Obviously there was the same kind of significant contention among the contributors to the magazine as you found among the people who came to its parties. But it wasn't personal when the opinions got into print. It was contentious, but it wasn't personal.

INTERVIEWER

And out of all that tumult and shouting came the *Partisan Review* . . .

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TRILLING

Yes. Out of that came *Partisan Review*—an excellent magazine. No doubt about it.

INTERVIEWER

One of the interesting parts of your book is about what fame does to the writer.

TRILLING

Well, I don't think fame hurts people; I think celebrity does. I make a real distinction between the two. Celebrity has to do with getting to know certain kinds of people and being invited to certain parties, having your name appear in gossip columns, things of that kind. That is celebrity. Fame is to be looked up to, to be given great regard, forever. I never think of T.S. Eliot as a celebrity; he was famous. Auden wasn't a celebrity; he was famous. When Lionel wrote in his journals that he was becoming famous, though not enough, he meant fame; he did not mean celebrity. He meant that people were writing articles about him; they thought highly of him. The ultimate test is immortality, of course.

INTERVIEWER

Can celebrity be dangerous to a writer?

TRILLING

Celebrity can hurt a writer badly. One of the things I feel about Saul Bellow is that he has done a remarkable job of avoiding celebrity. He's been very good at this, kept very clear of the kind of crummy things that he might have done in his position.

INTERVIEWER

Back to your own work. You wrote a play with a friend of yours which Lionel read and was so outraged by that he threw his pipe out of the window. Why was he so outraged?

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TRILLING

He thought that I had written a vulgar, stupid play. But it wasn't at all a vulgar play. It was a sweet, stupid play. He said it was debased.

INTERVIEWER

What was the play about, do you remember?

TRILLING

Of course I remember. It was a play about a Jewish detective, a clothing manufacturer with a taste for detection, who starts to solve a murder. In those days there was a West End Avenue Jewish-American culture. People on the way up. They had a wonderful idiom, a wonderful genre setting. I liked the play from that point of view. It wasn't my idea; the detection part of it was my friend's idea. I just provided the dialogue.

INTERVIEWER

Weren't you surprised that he threw his pipe out of the window?

TRILLING

Yes, at the moment. But he was in such a rage he didn't know what to do. He couldn't throw *me* out the window, so he threw his next favorite thing, his pipe and then rushed from the house. I thought he'd gone forever. When I was a child, my mother stormed out of the house after a quarrel with my father, and I remember thinking "This is the end, she'll never come back." I was scared out of my wits and kept saying to my brother,"Go after her, go after her!" He said, "Don't be such a fool!" He was about twelve. When Lionel stormed out at two o'clock in the morning I thought he was never going to come back. I rushed to the window to see which way he was going, whether he'd walked in front of a taxi, and I saw him bending over in the gutter, picking up pieces of pipe and being so miserable. You could see it from the fifth

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floor, that he was absolutely wretched, standing there stroking what was left of his pipe.

INTERVIEWER

Is it true that you were going to write an essay about the female view of Hemingway, and Lionel stopped you?

TRILLING

Oh yes, he stopped me. He sure stopped me. What I was going to write was a woman's reading of Hemingway. No woman had ever done that. Women were swooning at the thought of Hemingway, but they never asked, "What is he saying about women?" This was long before women's liberation. So in that atmosphere Lionel thought I was putting my head on the block, which indeed I probably was. He said, "They'll kill you for it!" "They" were the *Partisan Review* people, as a group, the twelve, sixteen, twenty-six people who made or unmade you.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any idea what you would have said?

TRILLING

About Hemingway? I would have said he was a sexual fraud.

INTERVIEWER

Is that the female view of Hemingway?

TRILLING

I don't know. I've never talked about it with any woman. What do you think?

INTERVIEWER

I've always read him in a kind of conventional and non-gender way.

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TRILLING

He made too much boast of his masculinity for it to be trusted. Can you trust somebody who boasts all the time about his masculinity?

INTERVIEWER

Lionel was a great admirer of Hemingway?

TRILLING

He had this whole secret admiration of Hemingway! He would never have wanted the *Partisan Review* people to know this. They didn't have that high a regard for Hemingway. Nor did he, actually.

INTERVIEWER

Since they were all mostly critics, who were their novelists of choice?

TRILLING

Who were their novelists? Most of them were dead. They would have been the great novelists of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. On a level below the masters I don't know who they would have admired.

INTERVIEWER

How about the *engagé* novelists? Sartre?

TRILLING

They were interested in Sartre, rather than admiring him.

INTERVIEWER

Dreiser?

TRILLING

Dreiser was to be tolerated. They had very great regard, and quite rightly so, for F. Scott Fitzgerald. They were interested in the fiction of their own group—Mary McCarthy, Jean Stafford

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and Saul Bellow. I don't think they had as high regard for Mailer as they did for Bellow, but they had regard. I was the first person to write about Norman Mailer on that level of seriousness: "The Moral Radicalism of Norman Mailer." Norman was himself taken aback by it.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that Lionel regretted that he was limited to criticism . . .

TRILLING

Lionel did not like any of the qualities in himself for which he was most admired. He did not want to be thought of as that moderate gracious person he was generally felt to be. He felt that that part of his character was what had kept him from being a novelist. He made this quite strange dichotomy between fiction and criticism . . . that criticism was governed by the superego and that fiction was created by the free play of the id, the life of impulse and instinct. Because of his strong superego, he had given himself over to the civilizing elements in his nature, with the unhappy result that he had denied his ability to be a novelist. It's a very primitive idea that life is quite as compartmentalized as that.

INTERVIEWER

Did you discuss this with him?

TRILLING

Well, it wasn't a subject that we sat and discussed in the terms in which we're discussing it now. He would have thought that was intrusive. But he would act it out. I tell in my book of the time that he read the Lillian Ross profile of Ernest Hemingway in the *New Yorker*. He walked in and threw it at me and said,"You read that and you expect *me* to be a novelist." Meaning, how can I get to be a novelist if I can't free myself of the restraints imposed by super-ego. He found, in some very interesting way, support for this view in his read-

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ing of Freud, who said that we give up the life of impulse as the price we pay for civilization. It is a big price, a tragedy of life that we make this trade, but a necessity if civilization is to be preserved. Lionel's personal version of it was that we give up the art of creation for criticism. It's of course sexual in its implication. We give up creation for the powers of the mind, which are the civilizing powers. It was very sad that he felt that way. That's why I say I would have liked him to have a thousand mistresses, if that's what would have made him happy. Perhaps it's a poor figure of speech.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have problems writing about him in your memoir?

TRILLING

When I write about us together I'm all right. When I write about him, I am restricted by the fear that I'm not being just or maybe I'm being indiscreet or unkind. When I write about myself, I can scarcely do it.

INTERVIEWER

Why is it so hard?

TRILLING

Years ago, I gathered a bibliography of the early portions of autobiographies, the childhood sections of autobiographies. I was going to do an anthology. But I was so busy I let it go by. The reason I wanted to do it was because the early portions of autobiographies are invariably fascinating. There is no one whose early life isn't fascinating. But as they begin to tell how they became these grown people writing the autobiographies, it usually becomes a bore. My writing about my grown self bored me.

INTERVIEWER

Are there certain things that you do not want to talk about in your book?

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TRILLING

Oh, surely.

INTERVIEWER

Like what?

TRILLING

How can I if I say they are so private that I don't want to talk about them?

INTERVIEWER

I need to think of a better way of asking . . .

TRILLING

No, seriously, there are certain areas of reticence that I do respect. I would not want to be graphic about my sexual life. I am shocked by how graphic the conversations about sex are on television. In this television program "Studs," the girls are put together with these boys to date. They go out and have this date and come back and describe what happened in front of large studio audiences, detailing how the young man had tickled her uvula.

INTERVIEWER

What?

TRILLING

She said his tongue was way down there, the uvula, it's back there you know, and she said this as easily as you might say, apples and oranges.

INTERVIEWER

There are strange disclosures in your book—one about James Agee.

TRILLING

About him watching Walker Evans make love to his, Agee's, wife. I'm not sure that's a true story. It's been told as a true

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story, you know, and it fits my notion of him very well. Egged on his friend to sleep with his wife, and then he'd sit and watch and cry.

INTERVIEWER

Why is that like Agee though?

TRILLING

He came on all innocence. But he wasn't a very innocent man.

INTERVIEWER

I wouldn't think so . . . to watch his wife being made love to by . . .

TRILLING

That's what I think. I mean if you ask your friend to make love to your wife that is not a simple act. It's not an innocent request.

INTERVIEWER

What about Walker Evans for doing it?

TRILLING

Walker would do that.

INTERVIEWER

He would?

TRILLING

I liked Walker enormously. Did you know him?

INTERVIEWER

No.

TRILLING

I did really like Walker. Also, he was the best dancer in the intellectual world. Which is not saying very much, but . . .

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INTERVIEWER

It doesn't surprise you that he would make love to Mrs. Agee?

TRILLING

Am I allowed to be psychoanalytical?

INTERVIEWER

Absolutely.

TRILLING

There's a great homosexual incentive to making love to your best friend's wife.

INTERVIEWER

You've been in analysis. Was it a helpful experience? Was it useful in your life?

TRILLING

I had a very odd experience of analysis. I had three analysts die while I was in analysis, one after the other. I went into analysis because I had phobias. I did not go into analysis as so many people, especially literary people do, for a general malaise, vague depression, inability to work, not functioning right in the world, in their marriages, things like that. I went into analysis for very precise reasons. I was having panics and I was having phobias, and I had to be rid of them. I owe analysis a great deal. I'm not sure that I owe my analysts a very great deal. I owe Freud's doctrine, the theory of analysis, as I learned to apply it, a great deal more than I owe the people who did the applying, my analysts. For instance, one of my analysts was herself a very disturbed person. She turned out to be morphine addicted. She was a very unstable character to have as one's analyst. She broke appointments more than she kept them. I was unable to free myself of this and go elsewhere because of the nature of my illness; I always felt that I was at fault. I didn't know, of course, that she was

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drug-addicted. I only found that out long after she was dead. Oh goodness, I would not have been there if I had known she was drug-addicted! At the time I just felt she was acting funny and was not, by my upbringing, licensed to act on such an observation.

INTERVIEWER

How long did this go on?

TRILLING

Five years.

INTERVIEWER

What about friendships? Have you had many friends?

TRILLING

Yes, happily. I always wanted to have a large-sized woman for a friend. That I was looking for a really oversized, bigger than life woman friend, and never found her, was why I wanted to be friends with Lillian Hellman. I thought she might be a great lady, but she turned out to be small-minded, like somebody, as I said once, sitting in a rocker in the Catskills, gossiping. The nearest I ever got to what I'd hoped for was Rebecca West. She was truly a very large-sized person, very generous spirited, and brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

INTERVIEWER

When did you first meet Lillian Hellman?

TRILLING

Lionel knew her first. They saw each other at meetings of the American Institute of Arts and Letters. Lillian kept saying she wanted all of us to be friends, but Lionel said that would be impossible because we had such different politics. Lionel and I had become confirmed anti-Stalinists. Lillian remained sympathetic to Stalin. Lionel reminded her of that difference in our politics, and he said she blanched. It was as if she hadn't

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realized how public her record was. Finally Lionel told her, "We'll try. But we won't talk politics." For a while it worked, and we were very, very close.

INTERVIEWER

What attracted you to her originally?

TRILLING

She was the most charming woman, the most entertaining. I don't suppose I've known anyone who was better company. And yet she was probably as wicked a person as I've ever known . . . deceitful and ruthless. But she was a wonderful anecdotalist. I can't quote anything she told me but she had such a strong personality and belief in herself and she enjoyed her stories so. She'd laugh this big belly laugh of hers—oh, she enjoyed herself while she was talking. She could be very funny. She could take any little incident in her life and report it or develop it in such a way as to be very amusing. She garnished everything with a little of her untruth. I remember I came in one day, and she was lying there in a dressing gown of some kind, ailing apparently. She said, "I have a great big bite under my left breast and I don't know how I got it. I haven't been near anybody to bite me. You can't bite yourself, can you? Under your breast? Have you ever bitten yourself?" I don't know whether she was making up the whole thing or whether she had a little scratch or something. But she had this kind of humor, very elaborate in an unusual way. Or she'd say, dead seriously, "Diana, do men have belly buttons? I haven't seen a man naked for so long I can't remember!"

INTERVIEWER

Aside from her humor she was a wonderful cook, wasn't she?

TRILLING

No. She was a Germanic cook. Everything was heavy. I mean it was goose or something.

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INTERVIEWER

Where did I get the idea that she was a great cook?

TRILLING

From herself. She promoted herself as a cook. She wrote about herself as a cook.

INTERVIEWER

What caused the schism between you?

TRILLING

Well, it had been brewing for a long time. It had to do with differences in politics. One day she decided to tell me what she had done in Washington when she was called up by the House Un-American Activities Committee. She showed me the lawyer's letter that she had read before the committee about cutting her conscience to fit the fashions of the time, and people thought Joan of Arc had landed. It was an awfully good letter, but she didn't write it. Joseph Rauh wrote it. It was a wonderful piece of public relations. But then she took the Fifth, though that was buried, you see, underneath the glamour. Like all guilty people she took the Fifth. I said to her, "You know, Lillian, if I were as stupid about politics as you are, I don't think I would touch them with a ten foot pole." She found that slightly irritating. That was the beginning of the end and the relationship eroded very rapidly after that. One night we had a conversation about the situation of Dashiell Hammett, with whom she lived, having to go to jail. I said, "Look, I'm sorry that Dash had to go to jail, but you know compared to what happens to people in the Soviet Union, it's very mild—six months in jail." Oh, she was so mad at me for that. It never occurred to her that anybody was ever jailed in the Soviet Union.

INTERVIEWER

So in the end most of these feuds turned out to be political.

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TRILLING

Mostly political, yes.

INTERVIEWER

Did you enjoy the experience of writing about your life, going back?

TRILLING

I worried. Was I getting it right, saying what I wanted to say. Standing back from it I wondered if it read the way I wanted it to? Is the prose adequate? I wouldn't have had these worries twenty years ago. These concerns have to do with two things—one was my age, the other my eyes. The fact that I have to do the book by dictation makes for a totally different literary performance than I have ever undertaken in the past. I'm not alone, private, the way you're supposed to be when you write. I'm talking to a secretary and whether I intend it or not, I'm waiting for her response. Did she catch my joke? Did she understand what I said? That's awful! I long to sit in front of a typewriter all by myself, staring at the page, seeing how a sentence looks instead of listening to how it sounds, having it constantly read back to me. The process is not natural; it makes me too conscious of my prose. What's worse, age is robbing me of words: I never dreamed of using the thesaurus but now I use one all the time. Not that it's of any help.

INTERVIEWER

Friends have been reading aloud to you. Proust. Dickens.

TRILLING

I have a friend who's been coming to read to me once a week since my vision became impaired. We've been reading Proust. It's fascinating to hear it aloud; I'd like to write an essay on the difference between reading a book and having it read aloud to you. If you're reading yourself and you see that page after page is filled with proper names, your eye

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automatically slides over it. But if someone is reading it to you, you have to take the full brunt of it—in Proust's case, the full brunt of his snobbery. It's not very attractive. But where Proust is at his best, as in the re-creation of his childhood, he's wonderful. Unmatchable. Wonderful to hear aloud. There's nothing like being read to aloud to become aware of the virtues and errors in a work.

INTERVIEWER

Did Proust or Dickens influence your style as a writer?

TRILLING

Oh goodness, no. While I'm writing a book I'd be afraid to read Henry James for fear that I'd start to imitate those world-encompassing sentences of his: he was born to be mimicked. But I'd be very glad to copy Dickens. If only I could!

INTERVIEWER

How does one learn to review?

TRILLING

By practice. By finding there are all sorts of ways in which to indicate what the story is without sitting down, painstakingly repeating it and boring your reader to death. One of the problems that I have in writing is that I go too fast; I'm always moving on to my next thought. I don't linger over an idea or a statement as I should. I always envied Lionel's ability to develop his thought, to extend it, take it for a walk around the block.

INTERVIEWER

How deliberate are you when you start writing? Do you have ideas and a concept in mind when you begin?

TRILLING

The question reminds me of a story I heard years and years ago about Rebecca West, which was told to me by a playwright

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named John Van Druten —he wrote *The Voice of the Turtle*. He crossed the Atlantic on the same ship as Rebecca West. He admired her enormously and he kept following her around asking questions: what she thought about books, art, politics, until she finally said, "Young man, don't you realize that I don't think without a typewriter?" I can't think without a typewriter, either.

INTERVIEWER

Don't you plan, or outline?

TRILLING

No, I don't. I try but my mind goes blank—except sometimes in the middle of the night; when I can't sleep I become very creative. But I never remember it when I get up in the morning.

INTERVIEWER

Are there advantages to being a woman writer?

TRILLING

I've always felt that there are. Although I'm liking being a woman less and less as the women's movement becomes more dominant in our society. I used to enjoy very much being a woman. I'm now not nearly as comfortable about it as I used to be.

INTERVIEWER

Why is that?

TRILLING

Gender is becoming too politicized. There's a horrible hostility toward men that is so intense it's almost palpable. I knew that it always existed but I didn't know it was so prevalent, and so fierce. We're in a period of new amazonianism.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you want to be more specific?

TRILLING

Let me take up something of which I have direct knowledge, and that is the Jean Harris case. I thought that Dr. Herman Tarnower was a very shabby character. I thought he was a vulgar and mean character. So I'm not speaking in defense of Dr. Tarnower. But so many women around the courtroom—or in beauty parlors—would address me because they knew I was writing a book. They would talk about Tarnower in voices full of such personal hatred, such obvious rage that I would wonder whether they thought she was justified in murdering him. And they would say, "That awful man?" as if the fact that he was an awful man was evidence enough—motive enough. I would say, "Granted that he was an awful man, does that give anyone, a woman, the right to kill him?" They would turn away in anger at me. They were so full of anger at men and at Tarnower specifically. They were for her because she was a woman. The women at the Harris trial were thinking in gender terms, not in terms of law, morality, right and wrong. I have a very distinct wish to separate myself from the voices of some of the women who are now making themselves heard. I think, as a matter of fact, it's up to women now to rescue men from the terrible position into which they are being put. For example, this issue of sexual harassment is going to be very bad in the marketplace because men are going to hire men if they possibly can instead of women, so they won't be available to the charge of sexual harassment. Oh, I think it's going to be bad for women, especially young attractive ones, in the marketplace. But that's a footnote. The main line of my reasoning is that I don't think that most of these things that are called sexual harassment are anything to talk about. When a man tells you dirty jokes, he's flirting, or he's just talking automatically. I don't think it makes life intolerable. A close friend and I shared the same dentist. She had exactly

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the same experience I had. He would get our mouths full of instruments so that we couldn't talk and then he would start telling us sexual stories, dirty jokes. I would sometimes gesture, "Oh, be quiet." It was really not anything that menaced my life or peace of mind in any degree. If it got to be bad, sometimes, I would put my fingers in my ears, but I was laughing all the time. The first time I met Norman Mailer was at a big dinner party, in which he was seated between me and Mrs. Askew, the wife of the art dealer, Curt Askew. She was hard of hearing and wore an ear trumpet, literally an ear trumpet, I think the only one I've ever seen in action. He was a very courteous young man. He was talking to her on his right the whole beginning of dinner, and then it was time to turn to me. He said, "And what about you, smart cunt?" I burst into laughter, because I thought, well you know, he's being so fresh and it really does take some courage to do that. And I thought it was terribly funny. It wasn't an insult. It wasn't harassment. It wasn't anything of the sort. What they are doing now with all of this emphasis on sexual harassment is emasculating men, robbing them . . . I think that a large number of men are going to become impotent if this keeps up. I have had a lot of sexual harassment in my time, not from men, but from women. And I don't mean lesbian advances. I can name several men who have acted abominably, not in sexual terms, but because they just acted very badly. But by and large the worst things that have happened to me have been done to me by women. I don't know what they had in mind precisely, but I do know that it was some kind of jealousy or envy. It may be that they wanted to sleep with Lionel, or it might have had something else to do with prestige, social situation or something of that kind. Women do this to each other all the time. They make up stories. And they are very clever about it. They destroy other women. I mean, what is this nonsense about sisterhood? There's much more brotherhood than there is sisterhood. When men set out to kill each other, they do it more openly. What I'm trying to say is very important. You see, I refuse to see life divided by gender in this

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way, in which women are the virtuous ones, and men are the ones without virtue. It seems to me a patently absurd position. In my own experience, it is not borne out. In my professional life, I have suffered very much from women, very little from men. I'm outraged by one woman lawyer after another coming on to these television shows to comment on this . . . you see their eyes steely and their mouths, they're scary people.

INTERVIEWER

How would you like to be remembered?

TRILLING

I can't suppose I will be remembered, but if I am I would like to be thought of as I *really* am, someone who is a thoroughly comfortable member of established society but someone who is also full of doubts and questions about that society. Finally, in the long run, my emphasis on the moral aspect of life may very well be the result of the pull in an opposite direction. Otherwise why did I write as frequently as I did about people who were adversaries to our society?

—Patricia Bosworth

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Robert Kunkle was born in Toledo, Ohio and received his masters degree from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University. "This Guy, Seemingly of Mature Years" is his first published story.

Wang Meng's "The Stubborn Porridge" was first published in China in early 1989; subsequent to the Tianamen Square massacre in June of that year, he was dismissed from his post as Culture Minister of China. His translator, **Zhu Hong**, is a research professor in English and American literature at the Institute of Foreign Literatures of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and is now a visting professor at Boston University. She has edited and translated *The Chinese Western*, an anthology of contemporary Chinese fiction, and *The Serenity of Whiteness*, an anthology of contemporary Chinese women writers.

Joanna Scott's most recent novel, *Arrogance*, was nominated for the 1991 PEN/Faulkner Award. She teaches at the University of Rochester and is a MacArthur Fellow.

POETRY

David Barber was awarded the PEN/New England Discovery Award in Poetry in 1991. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The New Republic*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry* and other publications.

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Nicholas Christopher has written four books of poetry, most recently, *In the Year of the Comet*. His next collection *5° & Other Poems* will be published by Viking in the fall.

Billy Collins's *Questions about Angels* was selected for the 1990 National Poetry Series. He teaches at Lehman College in the City University of New York and was named a Guggenheim Fellow for 1994.

Steven Cramer is the author of two collections of poetry: *The Eye that Desires to Look Upward*, published by Galileo in 1987, and *The World Book* published in 1992 by Copper Beach. He is a professor at Tufts University and MIT.

Kathy Fagan's first book, *The Raft*, was a National Poetry Series selection in 1985. She currently teaches at Ohio State University where she co-edits *The Journal*.

Daniel Hall's book *Hermit with Landscape* was published in 1990 in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. He has received a grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation and recently spent a year in Asia on an Amy Lowell Travelling Scholarship.

Judith Hall's first book *To Put the Mouth to* was published by William Morrow in 1992 and was selected for the National Poetry Series.

Wayne Koestenbaum, an associate professor of English at Yale, is the author of *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* and *Ode to Anne Moffo and Other Poems*. Persea will publish his second book of poems, *Rhapsodies of a Repeat Offender*, this spring.

Phillis Levin teaches in the MFA program at the University of Maryland and is the author of *Temples and Fields*, which won the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America. Her work appears in *The Best American Poetry 1989*.

Jacqueline Osherow's second collection of poems, *Conversations with Survivors* is forthcoming from the University of Georgia Press in April. She has been awarded the Witter Bynner Prize by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and an Ingram Merrill Foundation Grant.

Anna Rabinowitz lives in New York City where she co-edits *American Letters & Commentary* and serves as vice-president of the Poetry Society of America. Her poems have appeared in *The Southwest Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Epoch* and *The Best American Poetry 1989*.

Stephen Yenser's first volume of poems, *The Fire in All Things*, published by LSU Press, received the Walt Whitman Award for 1992. His critical books include *Circle to Circle: The Poetry of Robert Lowell* and *The Consuming Myth: The Work of James Merrill*. He is a professor and vice-chairman for Graduate Study in the English department at UCLA. "Blue Guide" is the 1993 recipient of *The Paris Review's* B. F. Conners Poetry Prize.

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INTERVIEW

William Young's (William Stafford interview) stories and poems have been published in *Southern Review*, *Shenandoah* and *Agni*.

FEATURES

Patricia Bosworth (Diana Trilling interview) is the author of two biographies of the actor Montgomery Clift and the photographer Diane Arbus. She writes for *The New York Times* and *The Nation* and is the editor-at-large of *Mirabella*.

Allen Ginsberg, Beat impressario, is best known for his poem *Howl*. He is the author of a book of photographs, *Allen Ginsberg: Photographs*, and several books of poetry.

James Salter has published five novels. His collection *Dusk & Other Stories* (1988) received the PEN/Faulkner Award. "Burning the Days" is a section from his memoirs, forthcoming in 1995 from Random House.

ART

Chuck Connelly was born in 1955 and lives in New York City. His artwork is reproduced courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., New York.

Dana Gordon has recently shown paintings in solo exhibitions at 55 Mercer and The Painting Center in New York City. The Anthology Film Archives presented a retrospective of his avant-garde films from 1968 to 1978, and Ranger Fine Arts has just published two fine-art limited edition prints.

Medrie MacPhee was born in Canada in 1953 and lives in New York City. Her works are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum; the drawings in this issue are reproduced courtesy of the Paolo Baldacci Gallery in New York City.

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The Paris Review

is pleased to announce its 1993 prizewinners.

Stephen Yenser has been awarded the B.F. Conners Prize for Poetry for his poem "Blue Guide," appearing in this issue.

Charles D'Ambrosio has been awarded the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction for his story "Her Real Name," appearing in issue 126.

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